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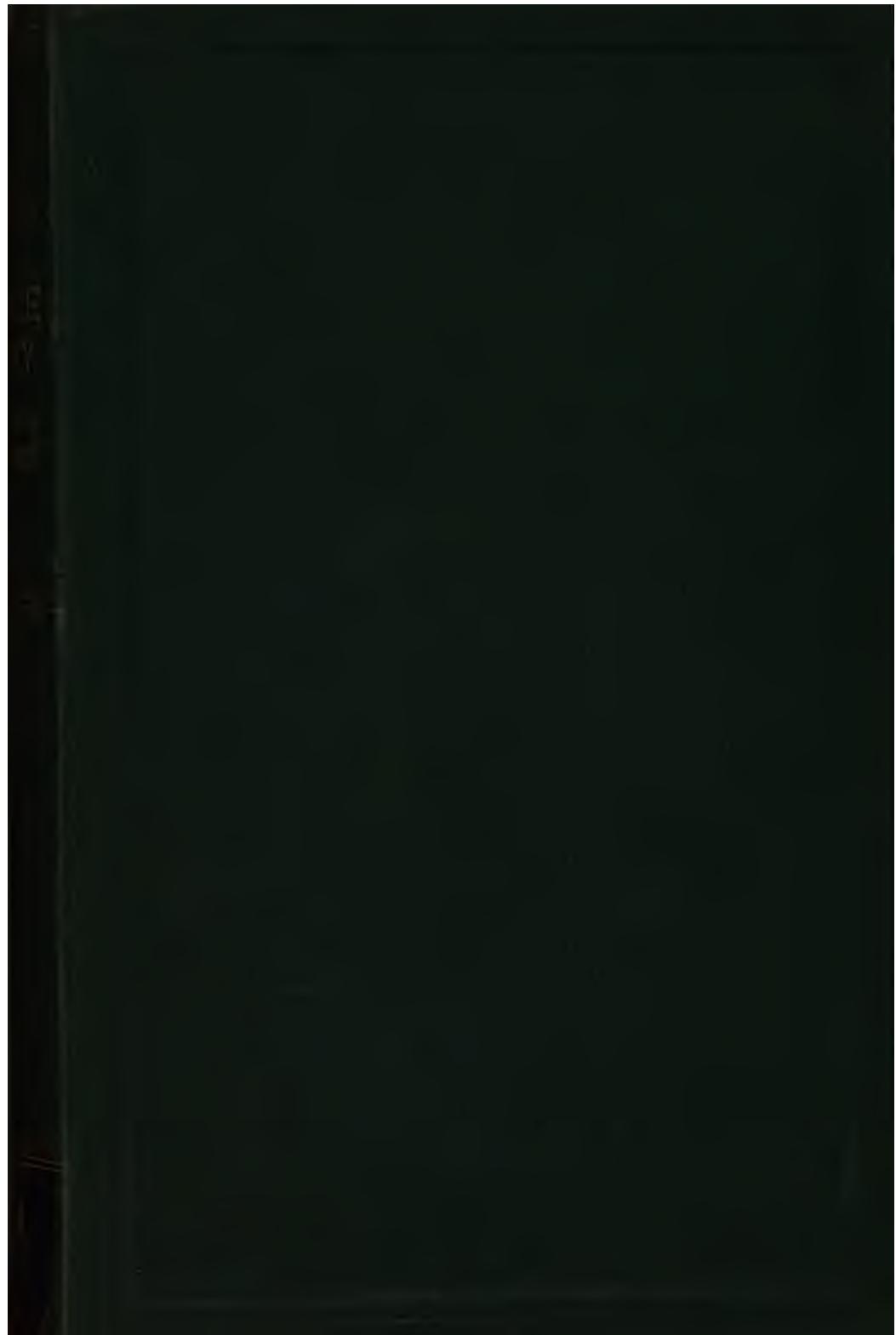
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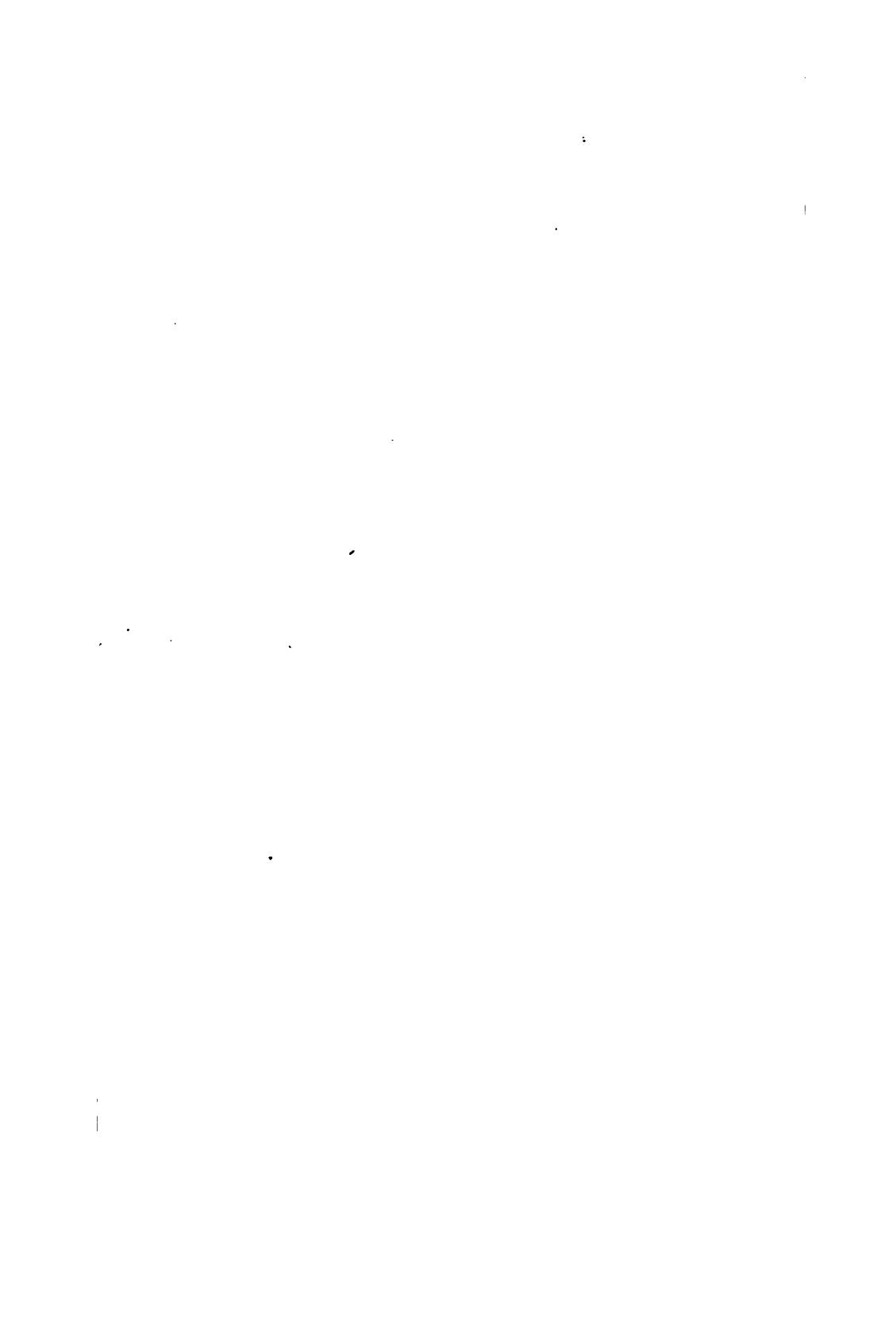




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A MERE STORY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "TWICE LOST," "LINNET'S
TRIAL," "QUEEN ISABEL," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

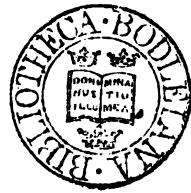
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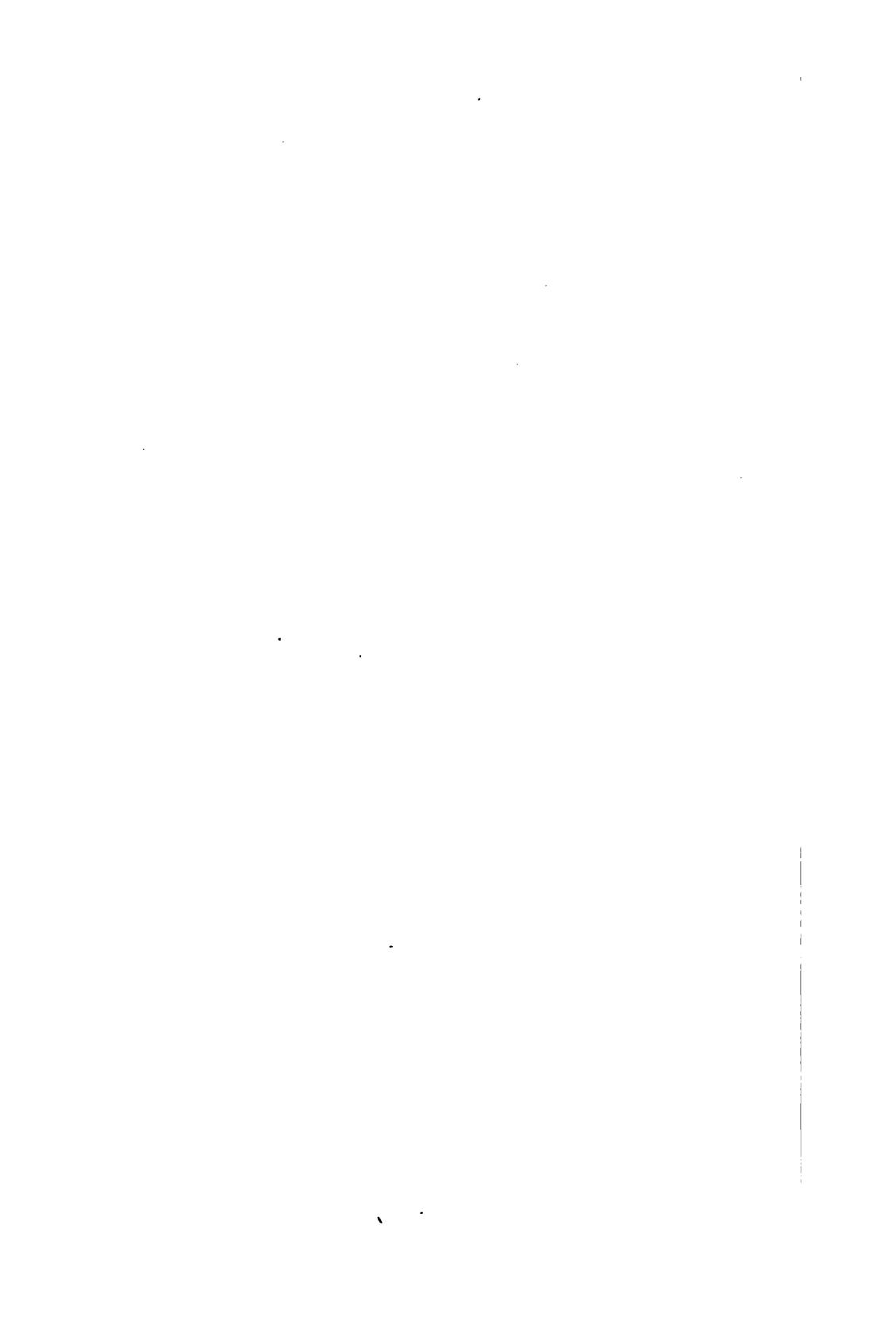
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Dedicated
TO
MY SISTER,
IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF
LIFE-LONG SYMPATHY AND LOVE.



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A MERE STORY.



CHAPTER I.

SENT FOR.

2*



T was about half-past nine o'clock on a chill evening in the early autumn. Sydney Lennard was tired, body and spirit. His nerves had been shaken by a somewhat delicate case of operation. His self-control never failed, but the natural quickness of sympathy which stood him in such good stead when it was necessary to divine the causes of any change in a patient's condition, rendered the task of self-control difficult when he was called upon to inflict pain. The effort rose with the difficulty, but it told afterwards. He was leaning back in his chair, not much inclined for conversation. His mother and eldest sister, ever observant of his smallest needs and wishes, were murmuring small talk to each other under their breath at the tea-table; Jessy, the youngest, who was gene-

rally allowed to take liberties with everybody in the house except her mother, was carrying his tea-cup to him, with an air of unusual caution and respect, when a rattling knock at the door made the whole party start. It seemed to make the sober old factotum in the kitchen start too, for she answered the summons herself, instead of leaving that duty to be performed by the boy in buttons, on whom the external dignity of Mr. Lennard's *ménage* was supposed to depend. She afterwards came up stairs with a rush, and announced breathlessly, as she broke into the drawing-room, "Sir! a telegram!"

Telegrams were not quite such every-day occurrences then as they have since become, and Mr. Lennard's professional name was not so widely known as to make it natural for him to expect a summons in such a guise. Still, as the family was more than usually alone in the world, and as there was no private source from which they could receive news of sufficient importance to be communicated in such a manner, they at once concluded that it must be a professional message. And so it proved. These were the words which the young man read, first to himself, afterwards to his companions:—

"15, George Street, Northborough. From Mrs. Jermyn. She is worse, and if you do not come instantly, will die before you see her. A telegram was sent yesterday."

This was puzzling. The name of Jermyn was unknown to Sydney Lennard. At Northborough, a large manufacturing town, eight hours distant from London by rail, he had never been in his life, and the previous telegram alluded to had not been received. They stood and looked at each other.

"There must be some private channel which we cannot guess," said the mother rapidly, after a moment's thought. She had no difficulty in believing that her son's fame was likely to spread through private unguessed channels. "It is clearly a case of life and death. You will have time to catch the last North train."

"Mrs. Jermyn!" repeated Sydney, half incredulously. "Quite unknown to me. However, there is but one possible explanation. How unfortunate that the earlier telegram should not have arrived; there must be gross neglect somewhere. I dare say it will come with a great *esclandre* as soon as I am off."

"Nothing is ever arranged as it ought to be," said the eldest sister, decisively.

The statement was broad, and was possibly occasioned in part by certain untoward circumstances which had occurred at a dance a few evenings before, since which it had been observed that Miss Emily Lennard had become rather stern and philosophical in her views of life. Sydney did not precisely understand the matter, though

Jessy had confided to him, in very plaintive tones, that Mr. Eversham had only danced once with Emily, and Emily had been near him several times during the evening, and he *must* have seen that she was disengaged.

Jessy, who had slipped out of the room, came back with her brother's great-coat and gloves. She always did what was wanted a little sooner than it was expected of her, and she was consequently a great comfort in a family circle, though she unconsciously inflicted many a pang of self-reproach on those whose wishes were as friendly as her own, but who were less happily constituted for seeing and doing. Sydney hastily swallowed his tea, ascertained that he had money enough in his purse to provide for all contingencies, and started for the Northern Station, promising to telegraph for his portmanteau if he found that he was likely to be detained.

Nothing worthy of note occurred during his journey, till chilled and weary he shook himself out of an uneasy doze, when the train stopped at Northborough, at a quarter past six on a grey, windy morning. As he jumped out, he caught sight of a woman's face wearing an indescribable expression of waiting and anxiety. She was dressed like a respectable servant, and she went up to the guard as soon as his foot was on the platform, and addressed him in a low hurried voice. He at once repeated her question, with

that peculiar railway shout which seems to have been invented for the express purpose of making the names of persons and places unintelligible to the world at large.

“Any gentleman here for Mrs. Jer—myn!” cried he. “Mr. Senna here for Mrs. Jer—myn!”

“Here, here!” exclaimed Sydney.

The woman turned and looked at him questioningly.

“I received a telegram last night, and started immediately,” continued he. “Is she alive?”

“Yes, sir; at least she was half an hour since. But it’s as much as you can say, and I hardly know by this time. We expected you yesterday. If you please, I’ll show you the way.”

Sydney followed her through that most cheerless and repulsive of all scenes—a large manufacturing town in the early morning-time. The mills were already at work, and the new smoke of to-day was beginning to add itself to the dense disgusting cloud of yesterday. It was mixed with that kind of mist which lies like silver among hills, and breaks into diamond drops upon the leaves of trees, but which here blended imperceptibly with the thick and tawny atmosphere, and only revealed its presence by the cold wet black stain which it inflicted upon cheeks and dress as you advanced through it. A faint foul odour issued from all doorways, and penetrated all streets. It was worst, as Sydney

afterwards found, in the church, where it was renewed in such concentrated strength every Sunday, that no amount of week-day cleansing availed to purify the place. The guide walked first, holding her dress up carefully, well knowing that nothing which touched it *could* be clean. She stopped, in a second-rate street, at a large general dealer's shop. Straw was laid down upon the road before it, and there was a private door with a muffled knocker. Sydney could not help thinking, as he looked up at the windows and saw what scanty accommodation for lodgers the house presented, that it was strange that people who lived in such a place could afford to send to London for a doctor. He was conducted up stairs into a small sitting-room looking to the street, and there the maid left him, with an assurance that she would send Miss Eva to him in a few minutes.

He sat down upon the horsehair sofa and looked about him. There was not much in the room to occupy his attention. Five or six repetitions of the monstrous pattern of a flaming painted drugget covered the floor, and produced an immediate impression of vulgarity and incompleteness which no arrangement of furniture or decorations could possibly modify. The walls sympathized with the carpet, and the oil-cloth cover upon the table sympathized with the walls. You could not help supposing that the same mind

had designed them all ; and the idea of the designer thus suggested to you became so vivid and so unpleasant, that it would have been difficult to settle yourself to any satisfactory occupation while you were under its influence. Against one wall hung a large old copperplate, representing the legs of a number of horses kicking violently in acknowledgment of the conversion of St. Paul, flanked by two ghastly landscapes, sketched in some world where colour is a sin, and light and shade exist not. There was a sideboard in a recess by the fire-place, and upon it stood a couple of empty decanters, a tea-caddy, a table lamp, and a pepper-castor ; the corresponding recess on the other side contained a few shelves with books.

Sydney Lennard was not a man given to analyzing his impressions ; he had not one artistic particle in his whole organization. But he was capable of receiving a strong general sense of comfort or discomfort from outward circumstances, even when they did not affect him physically ; he was a close observer of facts ; and he had a very kind heart. The result of his present observations was a strong general sense of discomfort, intensified by the thought, "This must be a wretched place to be ill in !" Minutes passed on and "Miss Eva" did not make her appearance. Was there nothing else for him to discover ? Yes. In the window a flower-pot containing a beautiful Cape jessamine just coming into bloom, and on the

table beside the flower-pot a pair of shoes—the tiniest daintiest prettiest things that ever were seen. You could not tax the owner of such a pair of shoes with untidiness, though she had left them on a table in the Queen's drawing-room. There was something in the shoes and the flower so inconsistent with the aspect of the things about them, that Lennard's curiosity was stirred, and he rose to make a closer inspection. He looked first at the books ; the catalogue rather surprised him. All Scott's and Byron's poems—old copies, but handsomely bound ; a Tennyson dropping from its well-worn cover ; a stray volume of Ruskin, Corinne, Delphine, Consuelo ; two volumes of Goethe, Keble's "Christian Year," and about half a dozen modern religious biographies and sermons, the titles of which showed plainly that they belonged to the school which used to be called Methodistical.

The owner of these shoes, thought Sydney, must have rather an oddly-furnished mind. There was one book with no title on its back, and he drew it from its place and examined it. It was a complete edition of "Shelley," in one volume, abundantly thumbed, and smelling strongly of tobacco. "Humph!" said Sydney to himself, "this, I suppose, is *Mr. Jermyn's.*" He opened it. The fly-leaf had been torn out, and there were other curious marks of violence about the book. It seemed to have narrowly escaped being

burned, for the edges of the leaves were singed, and one corner was actually destroyed through the whole thickness of the pages. It seemed, too, as if some one had impatiently torn across a whole handful of pages, for there was an irregular transverse rent running through at least fifty, which had in each instance been carefully mended by gumming strips of net on both sides of the leaf. Sydney had the book in his hand, and was indulging idle conjectures about the vicissitudes which it had undergone, when the door opened behind him, and he turned round to receive the expected Miss Eva.

A very young lady entered ; she could hardly be more than sixteen. She had an immense quantity of fair hair, drawn quite off her face, and massed together at the back of her head ; large hazel eyes, with dark eyebrows, and perfectly regular features. She was short, and delicately formed, but scarcely of such fairy proportions as to pass for the owner of the shoes. She had a restless, anxious, weary expression ; a little flush on the cheek—a little nervous trembling about the mouth ; she showed plainly that she had been watching all night, and that her heart was sore and heavy. Before Sydney could speak, she addressed him in a harsh, abrupt manner, which he attributed to the excitement and distress under which she evidently laboured.

“ She is asleep, and you can’t see her.”

"Asleep! I hope that is a sign of improvement. How long has she been ill?"

"How long!" repeated the girl, in the same sharp, cold voice; "what does that signify? She is dying—is not that enough for you?—dying."

The Doctor felt unspeakable pity for this poor child, whose mental strength seemed to be giving way under a strain which ought not to have been imposed upon one so young. He went up to her, and spoke as cheerfully as he could.

"Let us hope better things; sleep always promises well. You are worn out with nursing, and are not a good judge. Tell me a little of this illness before I see her. Was it a fever?"

"Fever—nonsense!" cried she, striking her foot impatiently on the ground. "Will you come in and look at her while she is asleep? You can stand where she won't see you."

He agreed; but as he was preparing to follow her upstairs he could not help saying a word to her about herself.

"I must be allowed to tell you, that I think you need to be prescribed for," said he, pleasantly. "Will you let me feel your pulse?"

He stretched out his hand to grasp her slender wrist, but she started back, put both her hands behind her, and exclaimed, with an indescribable accent of scorn—almost of fury—"Don't touch me!"

Lennard began to suspect that her mind was disturbed. There was something wild in her look--something inexplicable in her whole bearing—which quite justified the suspicion. Involuntarily he glanced at the book which he held in his hand, and wondered whether he saw in it the traces of some fit of insane violence. Her eye followed his.

“Oh! you have reclaimed your property,” said she, in a bitter voice. “There is nothing else of yours in the house, and *that* should not have been here, if I could have helped it.”

She turned as she spoke, and ran quickly upstairs. He followed, now fully convinced that she was insane, and wondering whether she was the patient for whom he had been summoned, and whether this singular *tête-à-tête* had been the only mode in which those about her could induce her to tolerate his presence. She opened a bedroom door, and went in, beckoning to him to follow. A screen had been placed across the entrance, and the two stood on the outer side of it, so as not to be visible to any person within the room. In one of the compartments of the screen was a small hole, covered with a piece of transparent muslin. Eva, without looking through this aperture herself, motioned to her companion to do so, and he obeyed.



CHAPTER II.

THE PATIENT.

HE bed was opposite to the door, and the curtains were drawn up. On the pillow lay a beautiful, but sadly wasted young face, with the eyes closed. There was a strong resemblance to Eva, but perhaps even a greater amount of beauty. An edge of blonde hair was just visible below the white cap, but the eyebrows, and the long lashes which rested upon the thin cheeks, were dark chestnut. The lady's sleep was profound, but the breathing was quick and uneasy, and the hollowed cheeks showed each a small patch of feverish scarlet. She was not the only tenant of the bed. There was a tiny head beside her, and the curve of a pink baby-cheek just peeped above the coverlet.

“When was it born?” whispered Sydney.

“More than three weeks ago.”

“And when did any dangerous symptoms show themselves?”

Eva gave him another indignant look, and

merely answered, "I don't know how you can bear to see it!"

At this moment the sleeper stirred, and half opened her eyes.

"On no account show yourself till the doctor comes," whispered Eva hastily, as she slipped out of the covert of the screen and left Lennard utterly mystified, but afraid to disobey her. Never was such transformation seen in the expression of a face as in hers when she approached the bed-side. Its ineffable tenderness brought tears to one's eyes. She stooped over the invalid and fondled and kissed her. "Did you want anything, darling?" she asked, in soft musical tones.

"No; I think not. Is he come, Eva?"

"It is not possible yet, dearest; but I am sure he *will* come."

"Not possible!" cried the sick girl, making a feeble effort to raise herself. "How do you know? You have heard; you are keeping something from me; there has been an accident; tell me quick, what is it? Is he hurt? Is he killed?"

The excessive rapidity with which she poured out these words contrasted painfully with the helplessness of her faint attempts to move, and effectually prevented her from hearing any answer. Eva, bending down till the two faces touched, murmured to her for some time; but

Sydney could only hear the low, soft inarticulate sound. Apparently she succeeded in soothing her patient, whose next accents were calmer and more natural.

“I had such a pleasant sleep, Eva ; I think I am better.”

“I am *sure* you are better, darling ; you don’t know how nice you look ; quite like yourself again.”

“Oh ! I am so glad I look nice. Do you think I might take my cap off before—before——”

“No, no,” cried Eva, quickly, “we must run no risks. Now, lie quiet, and don’t talk any more, and I will get you some tea.”

She came back to the door, and made a hasty sign to Lennard to go downstairs again. He had no choice but to comply. She did not accompany him, and he re-entered the parlour, feeling puzzled, interested, annoyed, and perhaps a little wronged. The maid was preparing breakfast. Lennard felt hungry after his journey, and was not sorry to be told to satisfy his hunger without waiting for Miss Eva, who would be “down presently.” While he was thus employed, he tried to obtain a little more information, but without success. The woman told him that she belonged to the house, and knew nothing of the two young ladies, except their names—Mrs. and Miss Jermyn—that they had been lodging there for five or six weeks, during the whole of which

time Mrs. Jermyn was very ill, frequently in hysterics, and apparently suffering much both in mind and body ; that they scarcely ever went out of doors, and would not allow a doctor to be called till the day on which Mrs. Jermyn was confined ; that Miss Eva was the dearest, brightest, sensiblest young lady that she (Rebecca, the maid) ever see'd in her born days. It was a wonder to think of her. Always the same, morning, noon, and night, and always tending her poor sister, and always thinking of everybody except herself, and giving no trouble to nobody. "And them little shoes was Mrs. Jermyn's, if you please, and did you ever please to see such bits of things before, for a grown woman ?" with which inquiry Rebecca took her leave, having heard the house-bell ring, and averring, as she quitted the room, that, if you pleased, this was the doctor. The step of a man was heard to pass upstairs to the bed-room. It was merely one riddle more. All Lennard's conjectures were so vague that he could not rest in them for a moment. The only notion which detached itself from them with any sort of prominence was that he had been summoned for a consultation, and that he should see the other "doctor" by and by ; and his only resolution was that the mystery, so far as he himself was involved in it, should be cleared up either at that interview, or during his next colloquy with Eva.

When he had finished his unsociable breakfast, he took out a little writing-case, which he (being a singularly methodical man) had not failed to bring with him, even on so sudden a journey, and began a letter to his mother! This is what he wrote:—

“ My dearest mother——”

Let us make a comment upon this beginning. Sydney Lennard, out of the precincts of his home, was as undemonstrative as the generality of Englishmen. Mrs. Lennard was not in any respect a *distinguée* old lady. Absolute simplicity and absence of pretension saved her from the lightest suspicion of vulgarity; but she was not highly polished; she was as matter-of-fact as her son, without his quick sympathy and keenness of intellect. She was a little *exigeante*, a little severe in her judgments, a little whimsical, and more than a little conventional. But she thought that there was no human being upon earth to compare with her son Sydney, except a certain younger brother of his, of whom we shall hear more hereafter, and who did not contribute very largely to her domestic happiness. And her son Sydney never inquired whether there was any woman on earth to compare with his mother. He simply considered that he belonged to her, and if he had at any time come to be aware that he had unconsciously caused her a pang, or omitted to procure her a

pleasure, he would have lain awake for nights, in vain remorse and self-reproach. Her character, her habits, her person, were the conditions of his life—all that he did or left undone was tacitly referred to them, and determined by them. She was a safety-valve for the natural tenderness which he would, perhaps, have been ashamed to exhibit towards anybody else. “My mother likes this”—“This is what my mother expects”—with such phrases he opened the door of his heart, and indulged himself in demonstrations which she never demanded, and to which spectators might have fancied that she gave but a scanty response, but which, nevertheless, she was always looking for, and would have missed, had they been withheld, more than her daily bread. And, “My mother is a little particular;” “This would annoy my mother”—were sufficient reasons to him for avoiding an acquaintance or abstaining from an engagement to which his own taste would, perhaps, have led him without any scruple or doubt. There was mutual accommodation in the compact, as there is in all compacts of which strong affection is the basis. Mrs. Lennard had set her son’s professional reputation on a pinnacle which nothing was to approach without due homage. She would sooner have died—this is no mere hyperbole, but the plainest fact—she would sooner have died than have caused or suffered the smallest obstacle to his

progress. She had also deeply considered the subject of his necessary recreations, and the question of the difference between men and women on the matter of recreation. She had settled in her mind that he deserved her entire confidence, and that she would never, by word, look, or sign, interfere with those hours which he voluntarily spent away from home. He did not try her hardly in this respect, and she was quite equal to the trial. And her reflections had culminated in one vast sacrifice, which she made after long deliberation, but made entirely, unhesitatingly, and cheerfully—she allowed him to smoke, in season and out of season—in her presence, in his bedroom (despite a fear of fire, which she cherished like an heir-loom), in the very drawing-room—which she afterwards purified by means of perfumes and open windows, till she herself could scarcely detect the lingering traces of the meerschaum. And in this respect there is no denying that he *did* try her hardly; but she was equal to this also.

Having accounted for the feminine beginning of Sydney's letter, we proceed to the letter itself:—

“**MY DEAREST MOTHER**,—I am altogether puzzled about my case, but the history is too long for a letter. I hope to be at home again before Sunday; but in case I am not, tell Jessy to look in the drawer of my writing-desk (she

need not open the desk itself) for my pass for the Zoological, otherwise you will lose your afternoon stroll. And please send my portmanteau. If I have time to add anything definite before I close this, I will, but I am writing for the early mail, that you may hear this evening, and I know so little—”

Just at this point the door opened, and the other doctor walked into the room—a bald-headed, middle-aged man, with a quiet kind and sensible face. He made a very stiff little bow, and before Sydney had time to speak, addressed him abruptly with these words:—

“It is my duty to tell you, sir, that your wife is in a very precarious state, and though there is a slight change for the better this morning, I hardly know how to sanction her seeing you.”

“My wife!” cried Lennard, starting from his seat. “There is some unaccountable mistake here, which must be cleared up immediately.”

“I was prepared for this,” said the Doctor, curling his lip with undisguised contempt. “Excuse me for saying that concealment is useless with me. These poor young things have told me all, and I wish, I only wish —”

He was interrupted by the entrance of Eva, to whom he turned with some heat, and added—

“Your brother-in-law, Miss Jermyn, thinks that I am under some mistake about his position here. Will you have the goodness to explain it to him?”

She looked at Lennard with flashing eyes. "If it were but a mistake!" cried she. "Oh, that she had never seen you!"

"Listen to me!" exclaimed Lennard, with a vehement decision which compelled a hearing. "My name is Sydney Lennard, and I am a surgeon, residing at 5, — Street, Cavendish Square. I received this telegram last night, and obeyed it instantly, supposing it to be a summons to a patient, and concluding that a former telegram had somehow missed me. I do not know for whom or for what I am mistaken, or how the mistake has arisen; but I am telling you the truth."

He drew the telegram from his pocket as he spoke, and presented it to the Doctor, with his card. The other appeared much surprised and was evidently about to return a courteous answer, when Eva, who was certainly (let us be forgiven for saying it) something of a virago, laid her hand upon his arm. "Remember," said she, "there is no lie of which he is not capable!"

It was a little difficult for any gentleman to hear such words spoken of himself without a sensation of anger, even though they were manifestly the result of a blunder. But the extreme youth, the beauty, the distress of the speaker, together with the evidently generous nature of her indignation, caused Lennard to feel nothing but a desire to justify himself in her eyes.

“Is there no way in which I can prove that I am not the person you take me for?” asked he. “You dare not show me to the poor lady upstairs. Is there no one in the house who would recognise me if ——”

“You *know* there is not!” retorted Eva angrily; but the next moment a thought seemed to strike her, and she darted out of the room.

“I do assure you, sir,” said Lennard, when she was gone, “I have told you the simple truth. I would give much to clear up this mystery, and not a little to be able to help these young ladies; for the scene of distress to which I have been introduced so strangely would touch the feelings of any man.”

While they still looked doubtfully at each other, Eva re-entered breathless.

“Here,” cried she, going up to the Doctor with a perfect confidence of manner, which seemed at least as natural to her as her indignation—“Here is the photograph. She always wore it round her neck, but she would never let me look at it. It was taken off when the blister was put on, and I never thought of it again. Look!”

She put the little case into his hand, and he opened it; and the two looked first at the portrait and then at Lennard’s face with a scrutiny and an astonishment that were almost ludicrous, till the object of their contemplation could no longer resist his desire to join them, and examine

the supposed representation of himself with his own eyes. The acquittal was complete. The photograph, which was coloured like a miniature, represented a fair man, with blue eyes, an aquiline nose, a profusion of light whiskers and moustache, and rather a florid complexion. Sydney Lennard was sallow, black-haired, black-eyed, and with no nose worth mentioning.

"Really, sir," said the Doctor, "we don't know how to apologize enough."

Eva covered her face with her pretty hands in quite an agony of shame.

"Pray forgive me," cried she, as soon as she could speak. "I don't know how it happened; but I am so sorry, and I do so beg your pardon."

She held out both her hands to Lennard, who was not backward to take them in his, and assure her of his forgiveness. Then passing in a moment to another emotion, she exclaimed—

"But how was it? What can have happened? And where can that wretched man be?"

"Tell me again the address to which you were told to write," said the Doctor.

"Lewis Lennard, 25, — Street, Cavendish Square."

"This number is five, not twenty-five," observed he, examining the telegram. "The initial of the Christian name might pass either for an L or an S. It is a curious coincidence, a very curious coin-

cidence ; but Lennard is not an uncommon name. Do you know 25, —— Street, Mr. Lennard?"

" Let me see," said Sydney. " Yes ; it is a small jeweller's shop."

" Oh !" rejoined the Doctor, turning to Eva, " no doubt he gave orders to have letters kept for him there, and the first telegram was properly directed, and arrived safely."

" And was received by him, and he took no notice of it ; the most likely thing in the world," answered Eva.

" The second telegram, if you remember, you did not take to the station yourself ; the maid took it."

" Yes," said Eva ; " that was the worst day. I could not leave her for a minute. I wrote the address in a great hurry, and I dare say I made a mistake in the number."

She stood thoughtfully looking down, her hands clasped together. The colour had gone quite out of her face when she uttered the words, " That was the worst day." Then she glanced up again.

" But you *do* think she is better ?"

" I hope so, my dear," said the Doctor, gravely, " but it is so very slight an improvement that we must not count on it yet. Now (taking her gently by the shoulders), do you go upstairs and sit by her quietly till I come to you. I want to have a little talk with this ill-used gentleman."

Eva gave Lennard a look deprecatory and apologetic, but seemed to have hardly spirit enough to utter any words of excuse. Then she yielded submissively to the advice urged upon her, and left the room.

“A sad case,” said Dr. Simpkinson, when she was gone.

“It seems so,” answered Lennard, with an accent of inquiry in his voice.

“Oh!” rejoined the other, “I cannot throw much light upon the mystery. When I was called in to that poor girl upstairs, I of course asked at once for the husband. But —” He shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows expressively, and after a pause, added, in a tone of indignant compassion, “And she is not nineteen yet!”

“And you don’t know the scoundrel’s name,” said Lennard.

“I know his aliases,” replied Dr. Simpkinson. “But I know nothing else—not even whether there was a false marriage. The child there implicitly believes that there was a real one, and of course I have said nothing to shake her—where’s the use? There’s not a particle of evidence except the ring, and that of course goes for nothing.”

“And can the people of the house tell you nothing?”

“Not a syllable; I’ll just tell you how it hap-

pened. Most respectable person, the woman of this house ; I've attended her, know all about her. Came to me a month ago about her lodgers ; told me all she knew. The two girls came to her in a fly, took the rooms for three months, and paid in advance. Kept very quiet, saw nobody, never went out. That poor thing was ill the whole time, and the other was nursing her. You may be sure my friend, Mrs. Matthews, tried to find out all she could about them ; couldn't find out a thing ! Helen—that's my patient—was perfectly unapproachable ; the other always stood between her and everybody ; and Eva always put a stop to every question as soon as it was asked. She said that her sister was very unhappy because her husband was obliged to be away, and that it was quite uncertain when he might be able to return ; and then, if Mrs. Matthews tried to continue the subject, Miss Eva always took out her purse, and asked her if she wanted any money ; she seemed to think that would stop her, and so it did. They were so quiet and so gentle in all their ways—such thorough ladies (that, you can see at a glance)—that Mrs. Matthews said she thought there couldn't be anything wrong about them ; but she was beginning to get very inquisitive about the mystery when Mrs. Jermyn, as she calls herself, was taken ill ; and Eva was frightened, and consented to send for me without any reference to the invalid

herself, who, up to that point, seems to have had her own way in everything."

"And when she was so ill, I suppose she broke down, and told you the history, for I remember you said that they had told you everything?"

"Not a bit of it," said Dr. Simpkinson, "that was only a strong statement intended to work upon your feelings. When I arrived, I was not received quite so badly as you were, but it was the next thing to it. Mrs. Jermyn, who is, I fancy, a regular spoilt child, would have nothing to say to me, wouldn't even look at me. I should have turned my back and walked off if it hadn't been for that poor little Eva who was so horribly frightened that I hadn't the heart to desert her; and before long the sister was too ill to understand anything that happened. Then, of course, I pressed the question about the husband; and then Eva told me, with a great burst of tears, that she knew nothing about him, had never seen him, didn't even know his name and address. 'Helen,' she said, 'would never tell anything.' Helen, meantime, was for ever calling upon him, begging him to come back to her, going down on her knees to him for pardon, assuring him that she had told nothing, that she had done exactly as he desired; it was the most pitiful thing you ever heard. At last, one day, in a lucid interval, she gave his name and address, and said that he

was to be sent for if she was in danger ; and then we first wrote, and afterwards telegraphed,—and you know the results."

" So that he may arrive at any moment," said Lennard.

" I shall be very much surprised if he does, observed Dr. Simpkinson, dryly.

" And where do these girls come from ? Have you not been able to find that out ?"

" Well, they come from a farm-house up the country, fifteen miles off, an out-of-the-way place, where they have been lodging. I have noted the name. Oh, here it is ! ' *Old Walcote, near Lenham.*' Lenham, being a morsel of a village among the hills. I have been thinking of riding over, and finding out what I could, but I am a busy man, and have never yet found time for it."

There was a little pause, while Lennard turned over in his mind the meagre scraps of information which he had obtained. Then, reverting to the subject of more immediate anxiety, he asked,

" Will she die ?"

" Can't say. Gave her up yesterday, but there's hope to-day. The worst of it is I have to go, and I really don't know in what hands to leave her."

" Surely," said Sydney, " they must have some friends of their own—some one to whom they could write for help—such a pair of children ! It's not credible that, even if there has been great

misconduct, there should not be somebody to come to them in their extremity."

"One would think so, certainly," returned Dr. Simpkinson; "and I must make another attempt upon Miss Eva; I can't make up my mind to go away, and leave them just as they are; but the little thing has a will of iron, and she never does anything but shake her head, and say 'No,' when I tell her to write to her friends; and to say the truth, I have not had time to go into the matter; I ought to be off now."

He looked at his watch as he spoke. "I see," he added, "that I have just a quarter of an hour to spare, shall we have the little thing down, and see what we can make of her between us?"

"By all means," replied Sydney Lennard, who was as curious as compassionate and as admiring as most men of seven-and-twenty would have been under the circumstances, and who wished for nothing better than to be allowed to conduct the examination of Miss Eva himself.

"I needn't tell you that she has a temper," said Dr. Simpkinson, with a slight laugh. "The people of the house tell me that there was by no means perfect peace between her and her sister before the illness came on. A scene or two now and then, I fancy, about this brother-in-law; but the wife—if wife she is—used to smooth matters over by going into hysterics if she was contradicted, and then she had it all her

own way in a moment. It's the best plan in the world if you have to deal with a warm-hearted person."

"Was this," asked Lennard, showing the torn volume of poems—"was this the result of one of the scenes?"

"I dare say it was; nothing more probable; I've a great mind to ask her."

Something in his tone jarred Lennard a little. He was evidently a good kind of man, but he was not exactly a gentleman, and Sydney Lennard, who *was*, felt—and then laughed at himself for feeling—an unreasonable inclination to stand between him and poor little Eva. He might well laugh at himself for so feeling, when he considered that he knew nothing of Eva, and that the person from whom he sought to defend her seemed to be the only friend she had in the world.

But, though he might laugh at the thought, he could not get rid of it, and it arose very strongly within him when Eva reappeared in obedience to the doctor's summons. She looked quite like a child as she came into the room with an air of timidity not natural to her, but caused by the slight sense of shame which she could not help feeling in Sydney's presence. Her cheeks were a little flushed, and her eyes had a haze of recent tears about them. She stood still, with her hands before her, and waited to be told why the doctor had sent for her.



CHAPTER III.

CROSS-EXAMINATION.



IT down, my dear," said Dr. Simpkinson; "we want to ask you a few questions."

Instantly her face changed, and an expression of defiance, with an indescribable tincture of fear, came into her eyes. She seemed to be getting herself ready for an expected contest, from which she wished to run away, but could not. Instead of advancing into the room, and sitting down as she was desired, she continued standing near the door, with her hand upon the lock, as if she were ready to make her escape at a moment's notice.

"Come, come," said Dr. Simpkinson, good-naturedly, but a little impatiently, "sit down; we are not going to eat you."

Lennard went up to her, took her gently but decidedly by the hand, and led her to a chair.

"You know," said he, with a smile, "you are not bound to answer anything that we say to

you, and we won't press you. We only want to help."

She looked at him gratefully. "I know that," she replied; "but I am so very much afraid of doing wrong."

"Take time," said he, "and weigh every question well before you answer it. I don't ask you to think about yourself, but think of that poor girl upstairs and her baby. Can it be right that she should be here so desolate in her illness, with no one to take care of her but yourself, and no one for you to appeal to, if she should be worse?"

"It is *not* right," answered she; "it is dreadfully, wickedly wrong; but I cannot help it. And *indeed* nobody can take better care of her than I can. I have always taken care of her."

She said it with a curiously quiet earnestness of manner, and Lennard felt convinced that, child as she was, she had always been the guiding spirit of the two.

"You look more fit to take care of a doll than anything else," muttered Dr. Simpkinson, who was not thoroughly pleased at having the conduct of the matter taken so successfully out of his hands.

"Don't judge by looks," said she, with a momentary archness, which seemed to indicate that there was plenty of play in the nature upon which gravity was now so painfully forced.

“I suppose,” said Lennard—“and please don’t be angry with me if the question hurts you—I may conclude that you and your sister are orphans.”

“Yes,” she replied, “orphans. We don’t remember papa; and mamma (with a little sob) died two years ago. Oh! I don’t mind telling you about that; and you must not mind my crying, for I really can’t help it. We have hardly any relations in the world. We were taken by our guardian, mamma’s cousin, and he was very unkind to us, and we hate him. I was sent to school as a punishment, nearly a year ago, and while I was at school it all happened.”

“As a punishment for what?” asked Sydney, smiling in spite of himself—“for hating your cousin?”

“No,” answered she; “they pretended that it was for not being industrious; but I knew quite well what it was really for. It was for always telling them how much Helen was admired, more than all the others, and for telling all the visitors how well she played and sang, when they didn’t want her to be asked.”

“And while you were at school?” said Lennard, in an inquiring tone, leading her on.

She was silent.

“Then you don’t mean to tell us anything about your sister’s marriage?” continued he, quietly, after a pause.

"I am so afraid of doing mischief," answered she, looking him frankly in the face. "You see I must not judge Helen by myself; *she* loves him, and thinks him quite perfect; and though he has deserted her, and I am quite sure he is a wretch, still, if there *is* the slightest chance of his coming back to her, and if I were to prevent it by telling any of his secrets, it would be dreadful, and Helen would never forgive me."

"I understand perfectly," said Lennard; "let us try to find out how much you can tell without any chance of future mischief. You shall decide each point for yourself."

"But why should I tell anything?" she asked. "What good will it do?"

"You know," answered he, "we must do such good as we can; and if it is not much, we can only wish that it were more. It seems to me that the thing to be done for your sister, in her unhappy position, is to make her husband aware of her illness. That might touch him, and induce him to return to her. Don't you think so?"

"I don't think it would," replied Eva. "If he could leave her as he did, and leave off answering her letters—oh, you don't know how heart-breaking it was when she was always watching the post, and when nothing came!—if he could desert her in that way, I am sure that it is useless to try to touch his heart."

"That's not quite certain," said Lennard;

“when you are a little older, you will see that people who have done very wrong—as wrong as possible—sometimes take a turn towards the right way, in the most unexpected, inconsistent, unreasonable manner. The experiment is always worth trying, and I never give up hope—no more than I would give up trying a new remedy because an old one had failed, and the patient seemed to be dying. But suppose that we do make the trial, and that it fails, will it not be best for you both to know the truth? Will it not help you to decide what you ought to do, if it is made quite clear and unmistakable that the man is worthless, and that you will see no more of him?”

“It would kill Helen,” cried she, clasping her hands with a look of terror. “Oh! you don’t know Helen; she was never like other people—she is so sensitive and so delicate; and if anything happens to distress her, she begins to be ill immediately. I am strong, and can bear anything, but Helen ought never to have had anything to bear.”

“I don’t think,” said Lennard, very gently and pitifully, “that she will have less to bear because she is kept in uncertainty. You know the truth must come at last. And it seems to me—of course you know her constitution and character better than I do—but it seems to me, that if the great trouble comes to her after a long

time of doubt, and anxiety, and feverish hopes and fears, she will only be very much weakened, and less able to bear it. If we could anyhow learn the truth now, we might keep it to ourselves as long as we thought proper, and choose the safest time for breaking it to her ; and in the meantime we might do everything in our power to bring her husband to a better mind, and we should have the advantage of not acting in the dark as regards either of them.”

He was struck by the gravity and earnestness with which she listened to him. In her eyes he could read that she was really considering what he said carefully, candidly, anxiously. There was none of that expression with which we all are familiar, and which tells in a moment that the person addressed hears what we say, but is listening all the while to his own previous convictions and determinations—that look of an unreceptive surface into which no new thought can sink.

After a short silence she answered, “Yes, I see that it would be much better. I will try ; I will try”—such force in the tone, as if she began the effort at that very moment—“not to be cowardly ; but it will be so hard, so very hard if I have to vex Helen.”

“Trust us,” cried Lennard, not able to help taking her hand in his, “we will take care of that. We will keep our own counsel and yours ; and if you enable us to act for Helen’s good,

we will do it so cautiously that neither she nor any one else shall be able to take any sort of offence, and your name shall never be mentioned."

She held his hand tightly in both her own. "But you know," said she in a broken voice, looking at him through her tears like a child—"you know I can't tell a falsehood if I am asked."

"No," answered he immediately; "of course not. But we will take the greatest possible care to avoid your being asked—such care, that if I were not the most cautious man in the world, I should venture to promise you beforehand that it shall not happen. However, I think you are so reasonable and so anxious to do right, and have so much courage, that I would rather tell you the exact truth, and say to you, If, after all our precautions, your sister *should* find that you have been acting for her with the best, kindest, most unselfish motives, and *should* be a little vexed with you at first, don't you think that you, feeling sure in your own heart that you were right, will be able to bear it?"

Her face showed that she found real comfort in being thus led up to look steadily at the danger, instead of being helped to run away from it; and after a little reflection, she again answered heartily—

"Yes, if I *do* feel quite sure of having done

right, I suppose I should be able to bear anything."

"No doubt of it," he answered. "Weakness is for the people who do wrong; and you must not be offended with me for saying that I think, when you consider how very young you are, and what a difficult position you are in, you ought to be ready to take advice, to give a good deal of weight to the judgments of others as to the right and wrong of the matter. Try to think of yourself as if you were somebody else—put yourself in my place, for instance—can't you fancy that I know a good deal more than you do of the dangers and troubles that you and your sister are likely to encounter, if you go on as you are, with nobody to help you? Try to believe really that they are dangers and troubles of which you are necessarily ignorant? Don't you think that you ought to take my advice—Dr. Simpkinson's—if you possibly can?"

"Yes," answered she, with the same slow, reluctant honesty of manner, "I do think that I ought if I possibly can."

Dr. Simpkinson was as well aware as Sydney himself that his name had been dragged in at the end of the sentence to save appearances; and being a human doctor, not by any means deficient in those impulses of self-love and fussiness which distinguish man from the lower animals, he was a little irritated when he found himself

so entirely in the background. At this point of the conversation, therefore, he struck in boldly—

“Our advice is, then,” said he, “that you give us your cousin’s name and address, and enable us to write at once to him, and acquaint him fully with your position and your sister’s, as far as you know it. Indeed, it is so entirely our duty to do this, that if you had not yielded to Mr. Lennard’s representations, we should have had no course left but to advertise in the “Times” with a description of you both.”

She looked frightened out of her senses, and Lennard saw in a moment that all the ground he had gained was lost. He was reading her closely, and he was convinced that in her own mind she resolved at that instant not to say another word, but to run away from Dr. Simpkinson and his advertisements as soon as it was possible to move Helen. He remembered, however, with a sense of relief, that this was absolutely impossible at present, and he understood and pitied the expression of utter despair which came into the poor child’s face, as she wrung her hands and looked to him for help.

“No, no,” said he to his colleague a little impatiently; “don’t you see that you are frightening her? Let the cousin alone for the present; it is the brother-in-law we want to get at.”

“Really,” observed Dr. Simpkinson, with a half laugh, “you seem to understand the matter

so much better than I do, that as I have an appointment, I think I had better leave it altogether in your hands."

"And you," said Eva reproachfully to Sydney, "you only say, leave the cousin alone 'for the present.' So that you are only making me do what you want in order to give me up to him at last. Is that what you mean?"

"No," he replied at once, and there was a most consoling force in the accent of the "no"—there seemed to be no doubt about it at all. "What I mean is, to find out if I can what is the right thing to be done, and then to advise you to do it. But I really am so much in the dark as yet, that I can't form an opinion as to what is the right thing to be done. I am sure, however, that it would not be right to trick you, even for your own good, and I give you my word that I won't do it."

"That's a great comfort," said she gravely, and with a deep sigh.

Sydney turned from her to Dr. Simpkinson.

"I'm afraid you think me rather an impertinent fellow," said he. "I hope very much that you will make allowances for the way in which all this has interested me; for I really feel that I have been carried out of my place. I'm a younger man than you, and I'm apt to get excited."

"Not at all, not at all," replied Dr. Simpkinson, with a good-natured laugh. "On the con-

trary, it seems to me that you are very particularly *in* your place. But look here! what's to be done? You, I suppose, are off to London again by the next train. I have an appointment, as I told you, and my time's just up" (he dropped his voice to a whisper); and the fact is, I *must* leave Northborough to-morrow. I have been staying on from day to day for this case, and I can't stay any longer; all my arrangements are upset as it is. Do you think you could manage to wait for the afternoon train, so that I could see you again to settle something if possible? I think I know a safe man with whom I could leave my patient, though I'm not very easy on that head. But if I could see you again at three o'clock, and if you could contrive to find out in the interval what we want to know — — ”

“I will certainly stay,” said Lennard; and obeying the impulse of the moment, he scribbled then and there a postscript to his letter, in which he told his mother that he should return by the night train, and desired her to “let Ferrars know forthwith.”

Ferrars was a great friend of his, in whose hands he had left his patients when he started for Northborough. They were in the habit of reckoning upon each other for any services which either might happen to require at a moment's notice.

“So,” said Dr. Simpkinson, watching him,

"give it to me, and I'll post it as I run down. Or shall I telegraph for you? I must pass the station."

The door opened, and the maid of the house appeared with a white face. "Oh! if you please," said she, "the lady's waked up, and she's took very bad indeed, and I think she's just going."

Eva's movement was a flash, and though the two doctors were quick enough, when they entered the bed-room they found her sitting on the pillow, and holding her sister in her arms. Helen's lips were grey and her cheeks dead white. She was in the very act of fainting, and if she had been suffered to fall into the swoon, would probably not have had enough vital force to rally from it. Luckily the woman of the house, whose pharmacopœia was simple, consisting of a few stimulants and of nothing else, had been keeping guard during Eva's absence. Before she rang for the servant, she had forced a little brandy between the sick girl's lips, and this just saved her. Dr. Simpkinson unhesitatingly doubled the dose, and Helen feebly unclosed her eyes, stirred a little, and sighed softly. Her face was scarcely whiter than Eva's. Lennard looked at them both, and felt a certain rising of the heart which proved that he was, as he said, a younger man than Dr. Simpkinson. Though it is, perhaps, unfair to say this; for the inexhaustible sympathy of doctors

is a marvel for which those who derive so much comfort and help from it can never be thankful enough. How an elderly man who has been seeing cases all his life can have any interest left for a new specimen, is a mystery. But everybody's experience can supply instances which prove, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that the interest is real, and not assumed as a mere convenience of manner; and it is pleasant to remember that the kinder as well as the fiercer emotions of our nature gain strength every time that they are suffered to prevail so far as to embody themselves in action.

The two men whispered together for five minutes before the elder took his leave. Such information as it was necessary for Lennard to obtain about the previous course of the illness was soon given. Eva saw that they looked very gravely at each other, and her heart died within her. She fixed her pathetic supplicating eyes upon Sydney, and seemed almost to entreat him to deceive her with some cheering word. He smiled and nodded to her, and she already felt so sure of his truthfulness that the little gesture comforted her unspeakably. Then, having looked quietly about him, and not seeming to discover what he sought, he left the room. In a few minutes he reappeared in the door-way, and beckoned Eva to come to him. She complied, and he led her into the next room.

"How many nights have you been up?" he asked.

"Five; but I am quite well. I am not going ____."

"Hush!" said he, raising his hand. "You are going to undress, and to lie down in this bed, and to drink what I give you; and I will give you my sacred word of honour, which I would not break for anybody, that I will call you in an instant if there is the slightest cause. See, if I were to tap the wall by your sister's bed-side, it could not fail to waken you. I think you have a long time of nursing before you, and you must let me judge about your strength for it. I don't want you to give it up; I want only to prevent you from being forced to give up. And you see I say 'a long time of nursing,' which shows you that I don't think there is immediate danger. I assure you there is not at present. Stop; I see you don't quite understand me. I must go if you don't do exactly what I tell you. It is my business to decide in matters of this kind, and I never stay a moment with a case unless I am obeyed. It is eight o'clock now, and at one you shall be waked, under any circumstances."

He held a wine-glass to her lips as he spoke, and she swallowed the contents, subdued by the conviction that he would certainly go if she resisted him, but looking at the same time so reluc-

tant, so unconvinced, and so wretched, that he pitied her from his heart.

“Good child!” said he, “now to bed as quickly as you can. You have never seen a case like this before, but I have seen dozens. The last I attended was a poor woman whose baby was just born, and who had no one to nurse her but her eldest little girl, only ten years old—a harder case than yours. Such a handy little docile nurse, and so careful and so anxious about mother! There would have been no serious illness in that case, but that the woman had been living on bread and water (just consider; nothing but bread and water for a sick, suffering woman) for many weeks. But we brought her through. Now, do you think a little about that before you go to sleep; and when you say your prayers, say a word for those who are worse off than yourself, for you see there are some such to be found. Good night.”

Bewildered and submissive, with her heart stirred by the thought of the poor mother and child, and vaguely consoled by the reflection that it was a case which ended in recovery, she crept into bed as soon as he left her; and the word which she said for those who were worse off than herself took the shape of a prayer, that they might all have such doctors as Sydney Lennard.



CHAPTER IV.

NOT MUCH GAINED.

SYDNEY LENNARD went through his five hours' watch very patiently. He was used to the slow pathetic succession of small incidents, which makes up the chronicle of a sick-room. He could give to each its place and weight, and knew the exact share which each had in indicating or promoting the catastrophe, and he could generally predict the end with great exactness, though he was wont to keep his anticipations to himself. His instinct rarely deceived him. It told him now that the girl by whose bed he sat was not going to die, and he trusted the promise in his heart, though the danger was so imminent, and the case so delicate, that he would have thought it a sin to utter his secret conviction, and induce others to lean upon it. But it gave a confidence and hopefulness to his look and his voice which were inexpressibly consoling.

As he watched Helen's face, he thought of

her history, putting together the slight hints he had gathered, and, without supplying any imaginary details (for that was not the manner of his mind), coming to certain substantial conclusions as to what had happened, and what was likely to happen, which were extremely unsatisfactory. He saw no light. Whether there had been a real marriage, or a mock marriage, or no marriage at all, one thing was clear—it was a case of heartless desertion ; and for this trouble he saw little hope of remedy. He would not decide at once—he would wait for Eva's narration. There might be some loop-hole—some possibility that the absence was compulsory. But when he said this to himself, he did not really think it. The earlier part of the story seemed to him to announce beforehand what the end was to be. Lennard was in the habit of thinking that self-sacrifice was a necessary part of a man's life, and he had acted upon the thought. When it was manifestly wanting he looked for little good. The mere fact of the hasty clandestine marriage—taking the best possible view of it—seemed to him to make inconstancy and desertion probable. The man, he thought, was evidently governed by his wishes, and was not to be depended upon. He did not take a precisely similar view about women. He was apt to consider that self-sacrifice was not to be expected from them—that in them it was something unnecessary and inconsistent, and

which ought not to be allowed. As his avocations brought him in contact with many households, and especially with the women in them, and as he found instance after instance in which the life of one was offered up for the comfort and satisfaction of the others, he became extremely uncomfortable. He longed to interfere, to equalize, to do what he called setting the thing right. He might really have been in danger of picking out some thoroughly uninteresting old maid who was giving herself up for the good of her family, and marrying her for the mere purpose of teaching her what it was to be petted and made much of and yielded to in everything, if it were not that the great number of perfectly uninteresting old maids who give themselves up for the good of their families might have made his choice difficult.

He looked down now at the lovely tender childish face on the pillow. No incredulity was mixed with his feeling that it was strange and sad that the very hand into which the young heart gave itself should be the hand to break it, for he knew the world. But reality only made the thing stranger and sadder. And he thought, too, how likely it was that she had turned away from half a dozen, any one of whom would have stood by her, and fairly done his best to make her happy, and had gone on to choose the one who only took her to make himself happy, and

who was ready to destroy her as soon as she stood in his way.

While he was thinking these things, Helen stirred and opened her eyes. There was a vague light in them, but no look of suffering; it was evident that the mind still wandered a little.

“Adrian,” said she, in the softest, most musical voice possible, “I *must* write to poor little Eva. She will be so wretched at not knowing where I am. Oh! don’t be angry, Adrian—why don’t you answer me? Oh, how very unkind you are! I’m sure you don’t love me at all!” She tried to raise herself in her bed. “Where is he? I don’t see him. Oh! he’s gone, he’s gone, he’s left me! He never writes to me! I shall never see him again—never again, never again, never again!”

Nothing could be imagined more melancholy than the voice in which she repeated the words “Never again.”

“Lie still and wait,” said Lennard, soothingly. “There has not been time yet for him to come back.”

She looked at him with a half-reasoning intentness.

“Of course there has not been time, or he would be here,” she said. “Nothing would keep him from me. But I think something must have happened to him, and that’s why I am so miserable.”

She turned her face down into the pillow, and wept for some time. The tears did not refresh her ; they became violent, and her sobs were terrible to hear. Lennard lifted her up gently, and made her swallow a composing draught. After a little while she was quiet.

"Are you the doctor ?" said she, quickly.

"Yes ; I'm taking care of you while Dr. Simpkinson is away."

"Am I going to die ? Please tell me the truth quick, while Eva is out of the room !—Oh, no ! don't tell me ; I don't want to hear ; I shall stop my ears, that I mayn't hear. Please, *please* don't tell me ; I'm so frightened."

"But I think you will get well," said Lennard, kindly, "if you will try to keep yourself as quiet as possible, and do all that we tell you."

"I don't want to get well," cried she, impatiently.

"Not for the sake of your baby ?"

"What is my baby ?" exclaimed she, in a harsh voice. "I don't want it, I don't care for it, take it away ; it's nothing to me *now*,—*and I did long for it so.*"

He put the child within the clasp of her arm, and she was presently fondling it and kissing it, and murmuring soft words into its tiny face ; and so she fell asleep again.

Lennard would have given his right hand to help her.

“Something I must do for them,” he said to himself—“some help I must find; but where and what? I must get thorough possession of the facts before Dr. Simpkinson comes, and make up my mind what to advise; I’ll not leave them till some step has been determined upon; and from one point nothing shall move me; I will make that child tell me who she belongs to, and see that she has somebody to take care of her.”

It was one o’clock by this time, and he kept his promise strictly, and sent the maid to wake Eva. He asked her to meet him in the parlour for a few minutes’ conversation, and, to set her mind at ease, wrote with a pencil on a slip of paper, “Your sister is quietly asleep, and I consider that she is a little better. Please come to me in the parlour for a few minutes; the maid can keep guard till she wakes.”

In a quarter of an hour he was told that Eva was ready for him, and he went down to her at once. She met him with a bright smile; a bare hand-breadth of hope was enough for her young spirits to leap from and land themselves in certainty. Her enforced sleep had refreshed her, and she looked eager, beautiful, and happy. In fact, as Lennard afterwards found, no creature in the world was ever more triumphantly gay in natural temperament than Eva. She had that utter buoyancy, that mere joy of existence, that exultation of body and soul which is born with

some, and which tempts to and excuses all sorts of extravagances before time has taught it soberness. You say of such persons, "their spirits run away with them ;" but the expression is too weak for Eva. You should have said of her that her spirits flew away with her ; and so they often did, and no one could tell where they might take her. The elders of a family are apt to look a little grave and troubled when they see this sort of temperament developing itself under their shadow. When the look and tone of excitement begin, and they know that the young thing is about to be carried off its feet and mastered by its own delight, they are inclined to check, to deprecate, to modify. Perhaps they are right ; yet the enjoyment is so pleasant a sight that it might be better to let it have its free course, and only watch that no mischief should come of it. And no one who has seen how indomitably and pertinaciously such spirits rise again after the shocks of life, how they shake their soiled plumes and spread them sun-wards again and again, dimmed and ruffled though they be, can doubt that they have received a gift and a power for which they cannot be too thankful. Indeed, experience teaches us this truth so deeply that it is sometimes saddening to look at the exuberant gaiety of youth, for no other reason than because you are apt to fancy that it would not have been given in so large a measure if it were

not required to supply a great need in future days.

“I want you to tell me,” said Lennard, after he had given his report of the patient, “all that you mean to tell ; I have been thinking a great deal of you both, and I am very anxious to help you if I can. Will you trust me ?”

“I will trust you altogether,” replied she readily, “if you will promise one thing.”

“No, no,” interrupted he, “it isn’t trust at all, it is just the reverse of trust, if you want me to commit myself beforehand. Well, we only met this morning ; it’s hard to expect you to believe in me altogether ; but we have no time to lose, and so I must take what I can get. Where was your sister married ?”

“In Scotland,” she answered. “They ran away ; but you must not judge her hardly for it, because you don’t know how unkind they were to her at home ; and then, afterwards, she was married again in a church, because the Scotch marriage was not enough to make her feel happy.”

“In what church ?” he asked.

“She never would tell me. He kept it all as secret as possible, and she did whatever he told her ; but I know that the church was in some large town on the North Road, where they stopped on their way back from Scotland.”

“And where did the Scotch marriage take place ?”

"I don't know; I only know that it was at an inn in some country village, and that she has got the names of the witnesses in her pocket-book?"

"Do you know under what names they were married?"

"Which marriage do you mean?" asked Eva with a little embarrassment.

"Either or both."

She held her head down, and was silent. Then, suddenly looking full into his eyes, with an ingenuous expression, she answered, "Well, the truth is, that is one of the things I don't mean to tell; Helen never would say. She was always angry if I pressed her at all, and she said that I ought to trust her without knowing anything, and so I do; but when her mind was wandering she often mentioned a name—and I think it must be his real name—and so I think that it would be mean and wrong to take advantage of having heard it in such a manner."

"Even," said Lennard, "when her whole happiness, perhaps her life, may depend on our being able to trace him?"

"I can't tell it," said Eva, clasping her hands.

"Well," he replied, "I won't urge you too far just now; I'll leave you to think of it. Suppose, as a first step, that you were to write to him under this real name, and tell him all the truth about your sister, and give him a chance of doing right for himself."

Eva reflected. "Helen would never forgive me if she knew," was her answer.

"Oh ! she would forgive you instantly if you were to bring him back to her."

"If I only thought there was a chance of that !" cried Eva. "But I think he would only write an angry letter, and reproach her for having betrayed him."

"You have a very bad opinion of him," said Lennard. "You never saw him, and you believe him to be really your sister's husband. What do you know of him that makes you think so badly of him ?"

"I know," she answered, with a flush of indignation, "that everything he has done has been wrong, and false, and selfish, and hard-hearted. He made her deceive everybody to go away with him, and then he left her. Didn't he know better than anybody that he would kill her if he didn't come back ? She was even beginning to be ill when he left her—my own, own darling Helen, that nobody ought ever to say a hard word to ! And all the while I was with her his letters kept making her more and more miserable. Oh ! you should have seen it ! They were so long coming ; and when they did come, I know they were cold and heartless, and not the least like what she expected. I used to dread the post. I never knew which was worst—she used to cry so bitterly when there was no letter ; and if there

was a letter she used to be so eager for it, and to read it over and over again ; and then, after all, she used to begin crying in a hopeless sort of way, which, I think, was worse than the other. If he could leave her in that way, do you think there can be any good at all in him ?”

“ It looks ill enough,” said Lennard, from his heart ; “ but I don’t give up hope that there may be some explanation, or that he may be touched when he hears of her danger. Will you try the experiment ?”

“ But she is getting well now—she is not in danger— Oh ! is she, is she in danger still ?” cried the poor child, a new emotion taking possession of her, and stifling all others for the moment.

“ She is better,” said Lennard, very gravely and gently, “ indeed, I would not tell you so if it were not the truth. But she has been in great danger, and we dare not yet say that she is quite safe. Don’t you think if you were to say only so much as that to him it might bring him back to her ?”

He was struck by the way in which she subdued herself, and by the return of the grave, earnest, self-possessed manner which he had noticed in her before. Young as she was, and vehement, impulsive, passionate as her temperament seemed to be, there was no doubt at all that she was already in the habit of conquering

herself ; that she was ready to act when action was demanded of her, though the cost and the pain might be great ; and that she had strong notions of right and duty, to which she was prepared to sacrifice anything.

“ Well,” said she quietly, though her quivering voice betrayed how deeply the thought that she must still believe Helen to be in danger, moved her, “ Well—I promise to write ; I think I ought to try it, and I will.”

“ I want to know,” resumed Lennard, “ how it was that you went to your sister. You say you were at school when she ran away ?”

“ Yes. They did not write to tell me of it for a long time, and I was getting so miserable, because Helen left off answering my letters, that I did not know what to do. Then, at last, they wrote to my governess, and she is a very kind person, and she broke it to me.”

“ Poor child,” began Sydney.

“ Oh, no !” interrupted she, with great vivacity, “ *That* didn’t make me unhappy at all, for I felt sure it was all right, and I was only so very glad she had made her escape. Mrs. Justin tried to make me think it was very wrong, and afterwards I began to see that there was wrong in it ; but at first I was only glad. You know it was only running away from a cousin ; it wasn’t a real home.”

Sydney did not stay to dispute the morality

of this view of the matter ; but went on with his questions.

“ How long have you been with her ? ” asked he.

“ Nearly three months,” was the answer. “ She wrote to me at last—first, a letter to say that she was perfectly happy, and that I must not grieve about not hearing from her, and that everything would be cleared up at last. And then, afterwards”—with a sudden change of accent, which told how exquisitely painful the recollection was—“ a dreadful letter, to say that she was miserable, and alone, and ill, and that she wanted me to come to her directly. She told me what to do, and where to go, and I went immediately.”

“ Went ? ” inquired Sydney. “ How ? Does this good-natured governess know where you are ? Did she allow it ? ”

He was immensely relieved by the idea that there was somebody to appeal to after all.

“ Nobody knows,” replied she, very coolly, “ except the girl who slept in my room, and who helped me. I got out of the window in the middle of the night, and waited for a very early coach, which was to take me part of the way, and I walked the rest. I left a letter to explain to Mrs. Justin ; but I am afraid she must have been very angry with Louisa notwithstanding.”

“And has no inquiry been made all this while? Have you been left quite to yourselves?”

“Oh no; they made all sorts of inquiries, and they took a great deal of trouble, and they did find us out once; but luckily, they did not come; they only wrote—wrote to say that Helen was out of their power and beyond their reach, and must be left to herself; but that it was different with me, and that I must come back, and my cousin would arrive and fetch me the next morning. So we set off at once and came here, and changed so often on the way that they haven’t been able to trace us. And that is one of the things that vexes Helen, because she thinks perhaps he is writing to the place where we were before, and that he doesn’t understand about our having moved. But there was nothing else for us to do, because you know we couldn’t be separated.”

“And how long do you expect this to go on?” inquired Lennard, in a very serious voice.

“How long—what do you mean?”

“I mean, have you at all thought of what you are to do by and by, if it please God that your sister gets better; what is to become of you, and of her, and of the baby?”

“I don’t see that you need ask in *that* way,” replied she, a little indignantly. “Of course we shall stay together.”

“But you will be traced again,” said he,

"and it is a wretched life indeed to be always hiding and running away, and it is not possible that it should succeed in the end in this country, where——"

"We could go abroad, you know," she interrupted.

"My dear child, you don't know what you are talking about, indeed you don't!" cried he, with an impatience that was full of kindness. "It is ruin and destruction for such a pair as you and your sister to go about the world unprotected; take my word for it, and believe that you don't know what is before you, and that it *must not be*."

"Yes," replied she composedly, "I know that is the sort of thing that people always say, and do you know it seems to me *such* nonsense. I shall be seventeen in four months, and if I had not been born a lady, nobody would think anything of my going away miles from home, all by myself, to be a housemaid; I don't think there's the least danger."

"What money have you?" asked he suddenly.

"We have had plenty till now. He left plenty with Helen, and of course he will send more. We have ten pounds left. Oh dear, I beg your pardon, I wasn't thinking—I suppose that isn't more than we owe you, but you needn't the least mind taking it, for we are sure to get more."

"Hush, hush, nonsense ! You owe me nothing, God help you," cried he, forcibly putting her hand, with her purse in it, back into her pocket. "Will you tell me your real name?"

"I am afraid, I am afraid," she answered.

"I'm not going to give you up," he exclaimed, "I tell you that plainly. I shall stick to you till I get you out of this wretched, false position. I should deserve to be shot if I didn't. I live in London, and have a hundred ways of finding out. Perhaps your cousin is one of my patients. Will you tell me where to find him, that I may do my best to induce him to receive you both again."

"But that would be of no use at all," replied she, "for I'm quite sure Helen wouldn't go."

"Well," he said, "we must wait a little. I'd much rather not have to starve you out, but I'm afraid that will be the end of it. If you won't trust me, I am very much disappointed and very sorry, but I can't help it. I must do my duty without being trusted."

"But I wish to trust you," said she, in a troubled voice.

"Wishes are useless, you know," he replied, "without acts."

"And is it really then what you think right, the only course you think right for us," she asked slowly, fixing her appealing eyes upon him, "that we should give each other up and be

parted, Helen and I, who have only each other in the world? And she to be left so desolate and so miserable with her little baby, after all she has suffered; and her loneliness to be my fault; and I know she would die, my poor, poor own Helen! Oh, you can't think that!"

He was sorely puzzled, for he felt that it would be worse than useless to tell her that Helen must take the consequences of her own error. So he only said, "What I think is, that you are too young to judge either for yourself or for her, and that while you are so young you must be doing wrong to defy the natural authorities which it has pleased God to set over you. Think seriously of what I say. Here is Dr. Simpkinson."



CHAPTER V.

FINDING OUT.

Twas a knock at the door, but it was not Dr. Simpkinson. When Rebecca appeared and began her announcement, with the words, "If you please, Miss, a young man—" Eva and Lennard both started forward with the same idea. The letter and the first telegram *had* reached their destination, and he was come! It would be hard to say whether the feeling was disappointment or relief when the sentence was finished. "If you please, Miss, a young man has brought a note." Eva was so white, and her hands trembled so much that Lennard took the note from her, and asking permission by a glance, opened it. It was from Dr. Simpkinson.

"I am extremely sorry," he wrote, "that it is quite out of my power to get down to you before I start. I give you my address, that you may write to me for any directions about your sister, and I add the address of the medical man in Northborough to

whom I advise you to apply in my absence. Let Mr. Lennard decide before he leaves whether a fresh opinion is wanted immediately. My idea is [that you may continue the treatment, according to] the written directions which I gave you last night, corresponding very fully with me, and not sending for Mr. Browne unless a change takes place. But I strongly urge your having a professional nurse, and I have desired a woman whom I can fully trust, to call on you this evening. She is nearly as good a doctor as I am. Keep up your spirits, and be a good girl, and do as you are told.

“E. SIMPKINSON.”

Enclosed was a shorter note to Lennard :—

“MY DEAR SIR,—I am utterly vexed at not being able to keep my appointment, but I assure you there is no help for it. I hope you succeeded in getting at the facts, and that you have settled what is to be done. Make any use of me you can. I think a nurse will do as well as any doctor for our patient, and will spare little Eva, which is the most important matter. If Mrs. Jermyn rallies it must be force of nature. She is past treatment—a return of fever would be fatal, as she is now far too weak to bear depletion in any form ; it is barely possible that she may not sink in the next two days, and then there might be a hope.—Yours sincerely,

“E. SIMPKINSON.”

"So," thought Lennard, "he washes his hands of the whole matter, and I dare say he is not sorry to do so. But what in the world am *I* to do? I suppose the rational proceeding would be to send at once for Mr. Browne, and take my leave. But that's beyond me. I must see my way a little farther before I go. And, besides, how long will the ten pounds last, with a nurse and a new doctor to pay? I don't see my way an inch. Of course I cannot make myself responsible for their expenses."

At this point of his soliloquy he began unconsciously to calculate the amount of their expenses for which he *might* venture to make himself responsible. It was not large. The money could only come out of the margin retained for his own *menus plaisirs*, and his worst enemy could never have accused him of making that margin too wide. He was a hard-working man, and he was earning a fair income, but his mother had but a hundred a year of her own, his two sisters were portionless, and the younger brother, who has been mentioned before, was nearly as great an inconvenience to him as Helen was to Eva, when considered from the stand-point of expediency. He had just settled that he might go as far as twenty pounds without being found out by his mother, when he looked up and saw Eva patiently watching him, quite satisfied to wait till he thought proper to tell her the contents of Dr.

Simpkinson's note. An odd feeling came over him that she had really become in some sense his property, and that it was his business to take care of her.

"Has anything happened?" asked she; "may I go up to Helen? She has been such a long time without me, and she might wake."

"Mrs. Matthews is to tap on the floor the moment she wakes," answered Lennard. "Yes, something has happened, and I am afraid you will be very sorry. Dr. Simpkinson is obliged to go away."

She looked so utterly horror-struck that he was sensible of a slight feeling of inward disappointment, for he had taken it for granted that she would understand that *he* was not going away too. But her first words undeceived him:—

"And you go back to London by the night train, and we shall be left quite alone, and Helen—" Speech failed her.

"Don't be alarmed," said he, with a smile, looking a little ashamed of himself, "I am *not* going back to London by the night train; I intend to stay a day or two till your sister may be left. There—it's nothing to thank me for, keep yourself quiet—(she made such a spring towards him, that he really thought she was going to kiss his hand and would be sorry for it afterwards)—there's Dr. Simpkinson's note for

you. You may go upstairs and read it. He is not to blame. I'll see you by and by, and have another talk about arrangements. Just now, I have two or three things to settle."

He was preparing to turn her out of the room, but she would not be silenced and dismissed.

"It is *wonderful* kindness," she cried; "and to strangers! I have been so bewildered that I have been hardly able to think what an inconvenience and expense all this must be to you. I haven't thanked you. I haven't begged your pardon. I don't know what to say or do, or whether I ought to accept of such kindness or not. Please make allowance for me, and don't think me ungrateful."

"Nonsense," he replied, "it's not your business to decide what I shall do; I'm quite old enough to decide for myself, so that the question of accepting or refusing does not come before you at all. But one thing I shall expect, if I really undertake this case, and do the very best I can for your sister and you—I shall expect perfect confidence."

"Yes," she replied, with downcast eyes and in a submissive voice.

"You feel that I have a right to it? Well—I won't be hard. I'm glad you don't force me to say that I might have to go at a moment's notice, which I should certainly do if I felt that I could not do my duty in remaining. I must

think it over a little; and whatever question I decide upon asking you this evening, I shall expect you to answer at once."

"I understand," she answered, in the same voice.

"But you'll have to trust me, you know," he continued, "and not to be so very meek and melancholy about it, or you'll make me uncomfortable. I'm not going to tie you hand and foot, and give you up to your oppressors. I promise you that. And to show you that I don't mean to take any unfair advantage of your submission, I tell you now to go and write the letter to your brother-in-law, just as we settled that you should do, before you were left at my mercy. You can write in the room up-stairs while I arrange my own matters."

He put her out at the door as he spoke, and then rang the bell. Mrs. Matthews herself appeared, on her way down from the sick-room, after Eva had relieved guard. She brought a good report. The patient had been sleeping quietly—a better sleep, she said, than she had yet seen.

"Ah!" said Lennard, "I thought there was a beginning of improvement. I'm going to stay and take this case while Dr. Simpkinson is away. Can I have a bed in the house?"

She said that he could, and added an inquiry whether "the young ladies was likely to

stay after their time was up ; because, if they was, she must own—she didn't like to press into matters that didn't concern her—but she was very particular on the point of respectability ; she didn't see that people could go too far in the direction of respectability, even if they wished it ; and as she had a house and a young grown-up daughter on her conscience, she should like just to know a little bit more about the ladies, just to be made quite sure there was nothing wrong.”

“Quite proper on your part,” answered Lennard. “We'll satisfy you. When is their time up ?”

“To-morrow fortnight, sir ; and I'm sure I wish them well, and don't mean to give them or you the least offence. Very nice young ladies they are, and most interesting. It's their being so interesting that makes me uneasy, if I must speak my mind.”

“I think,” said Lennard, “they are not likely to stay here after Mrs. Jermyn is well enough to be moved. I hope in a day or two that we shall be able to communicate with their friends, and that your mind will be quite relieved. In the meantime, here is my card, and here is the address (writing it as he spoke) of a person to whom you may refer, in order to satisfy yourself as to my respectability. I think you are quite right to be very particular.”

Lennard was a Rugby man, and he counted among his school-chums a young nobleman, with whom and with whose mother he had continued on excellent terms ever since he left Rugby. He was sure that he should greatly benefit the cause of the sisters, and establish a fine position for himself at a single move, by quietly handing over as his reference the address of "The Dowager Countess of Marsden, Marsden Hall, Suffolk." He did not know, or had forgotten, that the shooting-box to which the young Earl had often invited him—and where he, a thorough sportsman at heart, was still hoping to spend a week before the autumn was over—lay on the edge of the very county in which Northborough was. A moor and a wood were attached to it, and they extended over the boundary of the next county, and the next county contained the nearest post-town. This accounts for Lennard's overlooking a fact which proved of vast weight in determining Mrs. Matthews' views as to the height of his "respectability." She salaamed before the dowager's venerable name, and became instantly inarticulate in her professions of complete confidence.

Sydney's next business was to communicate with his people in London. He determined to telegraph and to write. When he had finished a note to his mother, in which he told her that he had a very serious case of illness, and was unex-

pectedly detained by it, but that he hoped to be at home in a few days, he sat some time, pen in hand, debating what he should say to Ferrars. Should he tell him to call at Clayton's, the jeweller, in — Street, and inquire about the other Mr. Lennard and the first telegram? It was impossible for Sydney to give any explanation that should be really sufficient, in his present hurried note, and he was afraid to tell Ferrars to act in so delicate a matter without explanation. In making the inquiry himself, he might, perhaps, be able to gather something, even if direct information were to be refused. So he resolved to defer it till he could get to London himself.

Having finished his letter, he went up to the sick-room. Helen was again awake, and he observed with satisfaction that her face was calm, and that natural pallor and exhaustion had taken the place of feverish excitement. He felt her pulse, spoke a cheering word or two, prescribed some jelly, waited to see her begin to eat it with some slight appearance of relish, and then beckoned Eva out of the room. It had occurred to him to try a little experiment on her confidence, for his own satisfaction.

“Is your letter ready?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied, hiding it between her hands. “I will take it to the post myself, by and by.”

"No, give it to me—I won't look at it. I'm going down, and I'll post it with my own letters."

She gave it to him without a moment's hesitation, and he went away contented. He delivered his telegram—"All well; don't expect me till you see me; send my portmanteau;"—and then hired a horse, and rode off in search of the farm-house at which Helen and Eva had lodged before they came into Northborough.

Lennard did not expect much from the results of his ride; but he was, in all that he did, a *thorough* man—not, perhaps, in the ordinary sense of the word, which is coloured by its Straffordian associations, and is held to imply something of a dark, daring, and unscrupulous determination—but in the sense of persistency and completeness, at any cost of labour.

He had made a compact with himself now that he would investigate the history of this missing man; and his way of behaviour, when he deliberately entered upon an undertaking, was not so much to examine carefully what could be done—to choose among many things the most promising; and to neglect the rest—as to do ALL that was possible, whether promising or not, so that in case of failure, he could never look back and say, "Oh, if I had not lost that chance!" The plan was simple, effectual, and fatiguing, and as he valued simplicity and effectiveness, and

did not care about fatigue, it suited him exactly. He easily found the house, introduced himself as a friend of Mrs. Jermyn, and asked to see the rooms which she had occupied. The only person at home was a stolid servant woman, who appeared to be capable of slow acts at the suggestion of others, but of nothing else. She showed him up-stairs at once, and departed to fetch the bread and cheese and beer, which he asked for solely in order to get rid of her. He made a minute examination of the two apartments during her absence, looking under the cushions, and behind the mirror, searching every corner of a small writing portfolio which lay on the table, and even pulling out from among the coals in the grate, which were arrayed in readiness for a future fire, an old envelope, directed and stamped, which caught his inquisitive eye. This last trophy was the only scrap of information which he carried away with him. It was addressed to Mrs. Jermyn, 27 — Street, Gloucester. The hand-writing was a man's, and the postmark was Fenbury, a place unknown to him by name. He put it carefully away in his pocket-book. In the porch of the house he put a few questions to his fair handmaiden before he took leave, touching her former lodgers; but the answers which he obtained were absolutely without any sort of meaning. As he got upon his horse, however, a new light presented itself. The boy who deli-

vered the bridle into his hand, and who had stood by and listened to the colloquy in the porch, said, with a dissatisfied look at the sixpence which Sydney offered him.

“The gen’lm’n as come arxing about them two ladies afore, giv me a ‘arf-a-crowned.”

“Did he, my man?” replied Lennard, promptly. “Then I suppose you answered his questions for it?”

He pulled out his purse again as he spoke.

“I answered what he arxed,” said the boy, sulkily; “but you ain’t arxed nothin’ o’ me.”

“When did this gentleman come?” said Lennard, showing the silver.

“Coom o’ Thursday or Friday; can’t swear.”

“What! last Thursday or Friday?”

“Noa; coom just by corn carrying.”

“And what was he like?”

At this question the boy looked perfectly hopeless, and was dumb.

“Was he young or old?” asked Sydney, defining it a little.

“Not *that* old,” said the lad, looking with humiliating significance straight into Sydney’s London-pale face, “but a bit more than grown-up, and wonderful hairy.”

“And what did he ask you about the ladies?”

“Arxed wen they come, an’ where they was gone, an’ whether either on ‘em was sick.”

“And you told him?”

“Ees; I told’n I didna knaw anyways.”

“Did he leave anything behind him?”

“Ees; ‘e left a ‘arf-a-crowned,” said the boy, grinning.

“Which he gave you because you knew nothing?”

“Noa; ‘e gev it me ‘cause I arxed missus.”

Sydney was as patient by nature as a cross-examining counsel is compelled to be when it is not his interest to frighten his witness, so he persevered—

“Oh, missus was the person who answered his questions? And what did she tell him?”

“She told ‘n nothin’ at all, an’ I told ‘er nothin’ at all, just as ‘e told me.”

“But what did you ask her?” said Sydney, thinking that he had at last framed a question which must compel the answer he wanted.

“Oo! I arxed ‘er wot ‘e arxed me—nothin’ more.”

“And she told you that the ladies were gone to Northborough, and that one of them was not very well; and then you told the gentleman —eh? was that it?”

“Noa,” said the boy, pocketing the half-crown which was by this time in his grasp, and grinning again, “she didn’t tell me where they was gone, but *you* did.”

“Just so,” cried Sydney, gathering himself up in a moment, and making a venture; “be-

cause she didn't want you to tell the gentleman anything about them, and I do. I want you to let him know where they are gone—will you?"

"Ees," was the reply, and for the first time the victim looked his persecutor in the face. We have no special meaning in calling them by these names; we have only a strong general sympathy for the sufferings of all persons who are expected to answer a series of questions, whether they have any desire to withhold the answer or not.

"But you can't write, can you?" pursued Sydney.

"Polly's to school, an' she can, an' she'll fill it in," said the lad.

"I'll fill it in if you have the letter about you," said Sydney. "And you ought to have it about you; I hope you have not left it at home," he added, sharply, "at the risk of some one finding it about; I have another half-crown for you if you have really been as careful about it as you were told to be."

The boy instantly dived into the recesses of his upper clothing, and produced a dirty brown-paper parcel, tied with pack-thread, and suspended round his neck by a loop of the same. He undid the knot, opened several folds, and drew out of them an envelope duly stamped and directed, which he proudly placed in Lennard's hand.

"If that's all, I've earn'd un," said he with decision.

"So you have," said Lennard, taking the letter, and honestly giving him the second half-crown in exchange, before he rode off with his prize.

"Master, master!" shouted the boy after him. He paused, and turned.

"Show 'ee the way to the post-office for six-pence; it's uncommon 'ard to find, I tell 'ee."

"I'll find it for myself, thank you, young shark," said Lennard, laughing.

The address on the letter was—

"WILLIAM HENDERSON, Esq.,
14, Seymour Street,
Portman Square,
London."

Lennard did not flatter himself that he had found a clue to the truant husband. There was no reason why he should either come or send to make secret inquiries after those who were only too anxious to acquaint him fully with all their proceedings; but he believed that he had got the information which he was seeking about the obnoxious guardian without wrenching it out of poor little Eva.

When he saw her after his return, he said to her, very composedly, "I want to know if you believe in magic?"

"What do you mean?" asked she, puzzled.

"I mean that I am a great magician, and can always find out everything that I wish to know. Since I saw you, I have commanded my familiar spirit to write a letter for me to your cousin, and here is the result."

He laid it before her on the table. Eva read the name, and became as white as a sheet. She looked up at him with a mute inquiry. Her eyes said, "What are you going to do with me?"

"You may read the letter if you like," said Lennard, a little mischievously, "and then it shall be for you to decide whether it goes to the post or no."

She opened it with quivering hands, and read these words:—

"Mrs. Jermyn and her sister are at 17, George Street, Northborough."

Lennard had "filled in" the address. Eva obeyed her first impulse, and tore the paper to pieces.

"Ah!" said he, laughing, "you are prompt, I know; but you have done no harm; I promised not to deliver you up unconditionally; but I know Mr. Henderson a little, and I mean to call upon him as soon as I get back to London, and to try whether I can't make some satisfactory arrangement with him."

"You may well say you know him 'a little,'" cried Eva. "It must be very little, indeed, if

you hope to make a satisfactory arrangement with him."

She spoke with an accent which implied that her view was unchangeable; but Eva was very young, and Sydney was very persuasive. He entertained no doubt at all that before he left Northborough he should have convinced her not only that his plan was right and wise, but that it had a fair chance of success.



CHAPTER VI.

MR. RIVERS, OF FENBURY PARK.

THE next few days were passed in a curious sort of domesticity. The improvement in Helen's state, though very slow and sadly interrupted by the agitation of her feelings, was yet sufficiently marked to satisfy Eva's soul with hope, and to justify Sydney in encouraging her. He sometimes shared her watch, sometimes supplied her place; but he was always very careful of her health, and did not abandon or relax the tone of good-humoured authority which he had assumed, and to which she patiently submitted. The relation between them was strange and pleasant to him. The intimacy produced by their circumstances was sudden and complete—more complete than years of acquaintanceship could have made it—yet its duration had been so short, they were altogether so new to each other, that each had to learn the other's ways, habits, and thoughts, from the beginning. It was a suc-

sion of small discoveries and surprises ; the amusement of society with the unceremoniousness of home. This was agreeable to Sydney—a man to whom form and ceremony in social intercourse were peculiarly oppressive. He was not one who took liberties, revelled in daring breaches of conventional rule, and according to his humour neglected common courtesy, or stormed your house and your heart, leaving you no alternative but repulse or admission. These were not in the least his ways. He was quiet, self-controlled, unobtrusive, very much inclined to let things taketheir course, and, with all his laboriousness, having a spice of indolence in his temperament. His impatience of ceremony showed itself rather in withdrawal than in advance. If he liked you—felt that you suited him,—wanted to win you—he did not begin by being free with you, but he showed you at once how free you might venture to be with him. He set his door open and said, “Come in ; here I am.” If you did not take advantage of the invitation, well ; he shut his door again after a time, smoked his pipe, and philosophized. You were very nice, doubtless ; but you were not for him. Perhaps you were only scrupulous and timid. He would do everything in his power to set you at your ease. His politeness was so frank and so kindly that you could not be afraid of him. His readiness was so marked that you

could not have a doubt about it, if you cared to consider it at all ; but still no pressure. The hand was opened and extended ; it touched you ; but it was for you to grasp it. Only some tremendous stimulus, such as he had never yet experienced, could have made him grasp yours first. But if you had the wish and the courage, his response was so instant and so hearty, your assurance of welcome was so immediate and so thorough, that when you came to reflect upon it afterwards, you could hardly tell which had taken the initiative ; you only knew that if it was yourself you had certainly no reason to repent it.

Just now, however, there could be no question as to which was to begin ; the point was settled for them ; fate itself had prescribed the terms on which they were to live. As Sydney watched this pretty little new thing moving about the room, making tea for him, sitting opposite to him at table, appealing to him on matters of the deepest and tenderest import, showing him all her springs of action and thought, laying her whole character bare to him unconsciously and inevitably, he said to himself sometimes that it was as good as a play. He was not falling in love with the child. That would have been quite out of his line. But it worried him a little that she was so entirely at her ease with him ; he fancied that she classed him with Dr. Simpkinson, or looked upon him as a kind of upper nurse ;

he would have liked her to know that he was only seven-and-twenty, and that there were women in the world to whom his attentions would be valuable. He sometimes thought that she considered him too old to pay attentions to anybody. And perhaps she did—for she was only sixteen and a half!

He took advantage of her familiarity to learn as much as possible of the past ; all, in fact, that was necessary in order to enable him to help her. And she had evidently a most conscientious remembrance of the compact between them ; whatever he chose to ask she was ready to answer. It interested him to see how careful she was to tell the truth upon every point as soon as he put a question to her—even if it was one which she inamostly disliked answering, she never hesitated a moment about it. It was to be done, and she did it bravely.

One day he asked her a question which she very evidently disliked answering. They were at breakfast ; they had come down together from Helen's room, with the pleasant certainty that there had been decided amendment in the last twenty-four hours. Sydney had insisted from the first that Eva should take her meals with him, "like a civilized being," as he said. It was a mode of securing that the meals should be deliberate, and of increasing the number of those short absences from the sick-room which he considered

essential to her health. It also gave him an opportunity of judging for himself of the state of her appetite and her nerves. Between her sense of the duty of obedience and the courtesy due to a guest (on the latter of these two points she was sensitively particular), she had always submitted to this arrangement, though with reluctance. This morning, however, she submitted willingly, and was gay.

He looked at her with a little malice in his eyes, held up before her the torn volume of Shelley, and said, coolly, "Were you in a great passion when you made all this havoc?"

She rose instantly, and came round to the place where he was sitting. There never was a human being so quick and impulsive in her movements as Eva; she was always doing what you did not expect, and doing it sooner than you thought possible. He put up his hands, with much alarm. "I hope you're not going to box my ears," said he.

She stood still by his side, blushing furiously. "I have a very hot temper," she said, in a penitent voice.

"Oh, I know that," he answered, "and now I have roused it."

"No, no, not in the least; only I am very much ashamed about that book, and I should like to hide it. But, if you wish, I will tell you all about it."

“Go back to your chair, then,” said he, “and sit down quietly, and tell me the whole history.”

She did exactly as she was told. “You see,” she said, after she had resumed her place behind the teacups, “when I first came to Helen I made a great mistake about her. I was so very angry with *him*”—(this pronoun did duty on all occasions for the brother-in-law’s name, being uttered with an intensely contemptuous accent, which effectually distinguished it from all other hims in the world)—“I thought him such a wretch; I thought he had used her so dreadfully ill, that it seemed to me as if it would be quite wrong to keep my opinion to myself. I did not understand Helen in the least about it. It used not to be at all difficult to manage Helen, and I did not know how difficult it had grown; and I thought, if I spoke very strongly indeed, and urged her very much, I could induce her to give him up. And so we had several quarrels. And one day, when there had been no letter at all—it was after a long, long time of no-letters, and she was just breaking her heart before my eyes—and she had been so miserable, and was looking so ill, and had been sleeping so badly, and I had been trying first one thing, and then another, to raise her spirits; and at last I had succeeded in cheering her just a little, and she agreed to come out with me for a walk. She had not left the house for

five days, and I thought it quite a triumph ; but as she was crossing the room to fetch her hat, there she saw that horrible book lying on the table, and it reminded her, and she dropped down into a chair and began crying and sobbing and moaning, and said she would not go out, and she did not care about her health in the least, and she only wished she could die. And then it was too much for me, and I took the book and tore it across and threw it into the fire, and said something dreadful about wishing to destroy every sign of him. And then she was very angry with me, and she pulled the book out of the fire again, and kissed it and petted it as if it had been——as if it had been baby.”

A sudden thought of the baby up-stairs gave peculiar softness to Eva’s look and voice as she finished her speech.

“ I don’t wonder at you in the least,” answered Sydney. “ I feel a very strong inclination to finish your work at this moment. I suppose it was your sister who repaired the effects of your assault with such a tender hand ?”

“ No ; I mended it.”

“ What a penance for you,” said he, examining the careful handiwork ; “ I really wonder how you could bring yourself to do it.”

“ Oh ! I didn’t like doing it at all ; but I would have done anything in the world to please poor Helen, and to make her forgive me. And

we never quarrel now, because I know it is of no use. At first I did not at all understand about her being so much in love. I did not understand what it was."

"And now you understand all about it?"

"Yes," she replied, in a grave, quiet, matter-of-fact tone, "*all.*"

Sydney smiled to himself; but it was characteristic of him that he did not try to lead her on from this point. It would not have given him the slightest amusement to make her commit herself, or to put her out of countenance. He was quite aware that it was in his power to do both, and by so doing effectually to caution her for the future; but he was so far from feeling inclined to do this himself, that I believe he would have run out of the room if he had seen anybody else on the point of doing it.

It was the seventh day after his arrival, and he felt no doubt at all now that he ought to be in London again. He said to himself that he would run down for a couple of days during the ensuing week, and satisfy himself that Helen's improvement continued. He knew that he had already stayed a little longer than he could quite justify to his reason, or to his mother, whose last letter, just received, betrayed some impatience and a good deal of curiosity. He was ashamed of the dislike which he felt to the idea of announcing his intention to Eva. "If it is so disagreeable

to me," thought he, "I had better do it at once." Of the three modes of encountering a difficulty—face it, avoid it, dally with it—the first was that which he always preferred, at least in theory.

"I think," said he, "your sister is improving so fast, that I shall not be afraid of leaving her for a little while to your care."

Eva had been anticipating this speech every hour of the day and night, and it was a terrible prospect to her. Her heart failed her at the thought of the lonely time to come, when she should be frightened at every passing pallor on Helen's cheek, and should have no one to tell her that it meant no mischief. Her inexperience would become her torment; it was her greatest help now, for it caused her to put her trust in the word of a doctor as if he were a divinity. But she had schooled herself well. She had reminded herself again and again that she and Helen had no sort of claim upon Sydney, that his home duties and engagements must needs assert themselves, and that it would be selfish, ungrateful, improper, altogether preposterous, if she were to say a word of opposition whenever it pleased him to announce his departure. She had settled exactly the manner in which she intended to behave, and she kept her intention.

"Of course I know you must go," said she, meekly; "and it is a great comfort that Helen is so much better."

And Sydney was inexpressibly disappointed that she did not then show stronger symptoms of distress.

“There is an up train at four o’clock,” he began, rather sharply.

“What!—to-day?” interrupted she, taken by surprise. She thought that he might have allowed her rather a longer time for preparation. Their uncomfortable dialogue was brought to a sudden stop by the postman’s knock. It came twenty minutes later than usual, as it always does when one is anxious for letters, and they had given it up for the day. Eva rushed down to open the door herself, and as she did not return, Sydney went to look for her. He found her half way up-stairs, with an open letter in her hand and another at her feet. She was too impatient to wait an unnecessary moment; and having torn open her packet as soon as she got it in her hands, she was now standing still to read it, unconscious of what she was doing. He saw her colour rise, her eyelashes shiver, her breast heave, and he laid a gentle grasp upon her, brought her into the parlour, and placed her upon the sofa.

“Now,” said he, “what is it?”

She was silent, and he sat down by her side. She moved the letter tremulously towards him, evidently intending him to read it over her shoulder, which he accordingly did without hesitation. This was what he read:—

“FENBURY PARK, Nov. 5, 18—.

“Mr. Rivers encloses a letter which arrived at Fenbury Park by this morning’s post. It is the second letter with the same address which has come into Mr. Rivers’s hands, and as the writers evidently labour under some misapprehension which Mr. Rivers is unable to remove, he thinks it best to return both the letters together, and he requests that no further applications of the same kind may be addressed to his house. If any such applications should be made in future they will not be returned, but they will be destroyed.”

Sydney looked at the papers which Eva had dropped, and which he had picked up. They were two letters, both addressed to “*Adrian Harford, Esq., Fenbury Park, B—shire.*” “May I read them?” asked he.

“Oh you may read anything now,” answered Eva, in a tone of bewilderment and despair.

He opened the first, which contained only these words:—

“I think you cannot know how ill Helen is. She was given over, and she is still in great danger. She is always calling for you. I am sure she will die if you do not come to her. Your baby was born eleven days ago. Is it possible that you can bear to stay away from it, and from Helen? If she dies you will have murdered her.”

“EVA LAKE.”

The other letter began thus :—

“ **M**Y OWN DARLING HUSBAND,—Why do you not write, why do you not come to me? I am so miserable and so ill, and I am breaking my heart for you. Just one word would give me life. I am doing what you desired me not to do, and writing to you at Fenbury, but you must not be angry, it is only because I could not bear it any longer. I know there is some good reason, and I dare say I am very weak and foolish, but you must forgive me because I am only a child, and I love you so, and I cannot live without hearing from you. Oh! my love, do you remember——.”

“ Ah ! ” cried Sydney, “ I can’t read any more of this. But let me seal it up, and take it away with me. If I should succeed in finding this Mr. Adrian Harford, I can deliver it to him.”

“ But what is the use ? ” asked Eva ; “ I suppose this is a false name like the others.”

“ It may be,” answered he, “ but I think we are on the track though we are still very much in the dark. Fenbury, at any rate, is a real place. And look here—this is what I picked up at your farm-house the other morning, and preserved as a piece of possible evidence.”

He gave her the scrap of a letter with the Fenbury post-mark upon it.

“ You see,” said he, “ your sister has received a letter from Fenbury before.”

“ But, perhaps,” said Eva, turning it over and over between her fingers, “ this was only the envelope of another returned letter. Helen may have tried Fenbury before.”

“ I don’t think so. This Mr. Rivers mentions only one previous letter. And your sister implies that she is writing to the forbidden address for the first time. Look at her words.”

Eva did look, and immediately began to cry. “ Oh ! my poor, poor darling ill-used Helen !” sobbed she, “ and there is nothing I can do for her !”

“ There,” cried Sydney, “ that was my fault —what a stupid fellow I am ! You had better not read another word of this pitiful little letter. Give it to me—that’s right. And what do you mean by saying there is nothing you can do for Helen ? I am ashamed of you for talking such nonsense. Why, you are giving up your life to her, and she owes her life to you.”

“ That is little to thank me for,” said Eva, wiping her eyes, “ since I can’t make her the least bit happy.”

“ No,” said he, gravely, “ not yet ; happiness comes from higher places, and we can none of us bring it, we can only wait for it and welcome it, or do without it. But just ask yourself what Helen would do without you. And just think

for a moment what a great thing it is to be such a help, such a comfort, such a support, when it has pleased God to send her such terrible affliction. I assure you I think there is nothing in the world so pleasant to remember afterwards as having been a comfort in trouble.

Eva smiled through her tears. "I am *that*," said she, simply, "thank you for reminding me of it."

"And now," pursued he, "I will tell you what I mean to do. When I get to London I shall go, in the first instance, to the jeweller's shop to which you telegraphed, and I shall learn all I can about my namesake, Mr. Lennard. Then, as soon as I can get a couple of days, I shall rush down to Fenbury and see what I can find out there. In the meantime you must write me a careful bulletin every day, and I shall send you the fullest directions. I shall leave with you this paper of questions. I have written down all the points which I want you to notice, and on which, if there is any change, I shall like to have immediate information. I can quite trust you to watch the symptoms. I don't expect that there will be the slightest cause for alarm; if I did, I would tell you so honestly. But if you are frightened—and it is very likely that you may be frightened without reason—write to me instantly without scruple. Don't be the least afraid of bothering me. I am the most patient man living,

and I am thoroughly used to have to do with nervous, with anxious people. Pour all your fears out, and be sure I'll attend to them."

"Thank you," said she, with a full heart.

"And, remember, you are to walk out for exactly half-an-hour every day, and you are to take all your meals in this room, and you are not to sit up at night if your sister continues as well as she is now. Do you promise?"

"Yes," replied she seriously, "you know I promised before."

"But I wanted to remind you, and to make quite sure. So much for Northborough. I've not quite finished telling you what I mean to do in London."

She looked at him anxiously, and clasped her hands together in entreaty.

"Ah! I see you know. Yes, I tell you the exact truth. I shall see the Hendersons, and do the best I can for you. Don't be afraid of me. Trust me. I will do nothing unkind, nothing harsh, nothing inconsiderate. I will remember that you two must not be parted. I will act in the matter as your friend, and as Helen's. But I must try to set it right, and there's an end of it."

She looked so utterly wretched that he set himself to soothe her as if she had been a child, and she was child enough to be soothed by kind words from a strong heart. The sound and

the presence subdued her, and she did not feel able to cling to her fears while he was exhorting her.

"One more promise I want," continued he, "you must pledge your word that you won't leave Northborough without letting me know where you go."

She gave the promise readily. Afterwards she repented it, when her terror that she should be given up to the Hendersons came back upon her and gathered force; but at the moment she did not look forward, and yielded instinctively, feeling that he was her only friend, and, for the time being, her natural governor.

"And now good-bye, you poor little thing," said he, holding out both hands, "God bless you. You'll see me again very soon, and I am so glad to be able to leave you with such a fair prospect."

She took the two hands stretched out to her, laid her face down upon them, and cried. Never did a man go away with a sorcer heart. He felt quite unmerciful for leaving her. As the train carried him back to London, he said to himself more than once that he had done a heartless thing, and that the poor solitary child could not possibly get through her troubles without him. And he quite forgot that he had been annoyed by the idea that she was not sufficiently distressed at parting with him.



CHAPTER VII.

BERTIE AND HIS SISTERS.

JESSY LENNARD was very uncomfortable in her mind. It is a fashion with modern critics to object to descriptions of mental discomfort when the sufferer is a woman; and the objection seems natural if we consider that critics are generally men, and that the distresses of women do for the most part connect themselves unmistakably with the conduct of men. It was certainly a man and a brother who was responsible for Jessy Lennard's present uneasiness.

The outward aspect of the Lennard family-party was placid and pleasant enough. They were all gathered together—that is to say, all except Sydney, who was, as we know, otherwise engaged—at dinner, in a cosy, cheerful room, to which the glow of a small fire gave a peculiar charm, because it was fully a month earlier in the year than the time at which you had a right to expect it. It was, therefore, a concession and

a privilege, and it was doubly exhilarating in consequence. Mrs. Lennard piqued herself upon understanding comfort, and, in that particular line, disregarding conventionality. In her house, when you were hungry you were to eat, when you were tired you were to lie down ; if you wished to stay at home you were not expected to give your reasons for not taking a walk ; if you had a fancy for sitting in your bed-room you were not encountered with mildly reproachful and surprised inquiries as soon as you descended into the drawing-room. The inexorable rules—for she had inexorable rules as we shall see hereafter—did not refer to such matters as these.

An hour after dinner, Robert Lennard, the other son of whom we have spoken already, had arrived unexpectedly, to the great joy of his mother, who doated upon him. He was sitting in Sydney's place, at the bottom of the table, where Mrs. Lennard so loved to see a son, that she was in the habit of saying, that when she was without one she did not consider herself to be dining at all. And she regulated her practice by this theory, for, on the rare occasions when she was sonless, no daughter was allowed to occupy the vacant throne ; but Mrs. Lennard and her two girls gathered together at the other end of the table, and had their meal on a tray, with a sort of studied sketchiness of arrangement implying that they were only taking just the amount of

refreshment which was absolutely necessary to carry them on to the next real dinner.

Robert Lennard, who now occupied the place of honour, was certainly a pleasant sight for a mother to look upon. He was a tall, frank-faced, bright-eyed creature, whose smooth brow, easy manner, and insouciant expression, made him look a good ten years younger than his hard-working, thoughtful, and somewhat careworn brother. His voice and his laugh were irresistible; he was the life of every circle that he entered; his arrival had a kind of champagne effect upon the home-group, putting them all into their best spirits in five minutes. Quizzing Emily, petting Jessy, chaffing Sydney, coaxing his mother—repose, languor, gravity, depression, were all impossible while he was in the house. His career had not been perfectly satisfactory in times past, but that was a matter condoned and forgotten—nay, as far as possible, ignored by his family. Mrs. Lennard thought it so great a disadvantage to her sons to have grown up without a father's care that it was quite natural that they should go wrong for a little while, and, rather supernatural than otherwise that they should come right afterwards. Not that her standard was low, or her ideas lax; quite the reverse. She was rather a severe judge of other people's children; but she had such absolute faith in her own that facts could not shake it. As each emergency arose she

did not hesitate to exhort, to blame, or to condemn ; but she was quite sure, through it all, that they were better than anybody else. Now, the plain fact about Robert Lennard was that his debts had twice been paid by his hard-working brother—once when he finished his “ education ” and started in life on his own account—a small sum then, but a heavy weight on the boyish conscience, and confessed not without tears. The pastrycook’s bill was a large item in the total, and there were also some very handsome presents to his sisters, which had been received with a gratitude and delight most agreeable to the donor, and by no means revocable when the elders of the household discovered that his generosity was attended by the slight drawback of costing nothing to himself. Mrs. Lennard had duly noted the nature of his extravagances when she talked the matter over with her elder son, while the culprit was in the next room awaiting his sentence in a state of wholesome uncertainty.

“ You see what an innocent fellow he is—quite a child,” she said, and Sydney acquiesced, though with some misgivings that the paid-for indulgences which did not appear, but which had caused this overflow of innocent debt, might possibly be a little less unobjectionable. It was well for Sydney, however, that the sum was small, for his own position was yet to win in those days, and the toil was hard, and the

success was tardy. He, too, would have liked very much to make handsome presents to his sisters, and to be rewarded for them by a torrent of kisses and thanks. And he, too, had tastes which sometimes appealed to him for indulgence, and which he now reproached himself for having sometimes indulged—opera-tickets and play-tickets, unnecessary hotel-dinners with congenial spirits at Richmond or elsewhere, rows on the river, stray books, superfluous prints, and purely ornamental waistcoats—all these things were against him. There were not many of them, and there was not one unpaid for; but still he reminded himself of them whenever he was inclined to be severe upon his brother. And so this first trouble passed away rapidly, and left no trace behind; and Robert having been duly lectured, and appearing to be in a thoroughly correct state of mind in all respects, was launched upon his career (a clerkship in a government office, obtained with infinite pains and anxiety, and securing a small and slowly-increasing income) with flowing sails, fair wind, and the best of good wishes.

But the voyage was not long, and the manner in which it was brought to a close gave occasion for grave doubts whether the vessel was seaworthy at all. Robert had been about two years and a half in his government office when the authorities politely intimated that it would be

well for him to resign, if he wished to avoid dismissal. The young man himself had been prepared for the blow by some half-dozen previous warnings, distributed throughout his two years and a half of service, and followed each one of them by a very short and violent interval of reformation. But the blow to his family was as sudden as it was severe. Sydney returned very sorrowfully from an interview with his brother's immediate superior, and had to tell his mother that he had been quite unable to find any plea for indulgence when he had learned the truth. The offender had been treated with great leniency.

When Mrs. Lennard heard this, her first impulse was to be decidedly angry with Sydney, and her second, to believe that the "authorities" had grossly exaggerated the matter, and that they ought to be compelled—yes, she said, compelled by every consideration of justice—to rescind their decision. But I am glad to say that she was reasonable enough at last to be a little angry with Robert. The strength of her incredulity was a measure of her distress when convinced, and this distress was a real punishment to her son. "I should not mind it in the least," he said, "if my mother did not take it to heart so." Perhaps it was as well that there should be something to bar him from that comfortable condition of "not minding it in the

least." But it was hard that Sydney and the girls should pay his penalty ; nevertheless it could not be denied that their mother's grief was quite as distressing to them as to the man who caused it. And poor Sydney had to pay the penalty in another way. Two years and a half of idleness in London, beginning at twenty years of age, are not to be bought cheap. But Sydney never let his mother know what the precise amount was that he sacrificed in order to set Robert straight before the world again ; and she, for a wonder, was content to remain in ignorance. I say, "for a wonder," because Mrs. Lennard's natural disposition was inquiring, not to say inquisitive, and she was in the habit of expecting perfect confidence from her children. I am not sure that the bitterest drop of all in the cup which she had now to drink, was not the sense that Robert had received those six warnings, and had been able to keep them to himself, and that she had guessed nothing about them, but had supposed him to be going on smoothly all the time.

Robert spent a year at home, and did not in the least appear to consider himself *de trop* there, or to chafe under his compulsory inaction. After the first fortnight, Mrs. Lennard roused herself from her depression, and said to her other children, " You know we must be very careful indeed not to make home-life irksome to him." And they at once responded to the sentiment, and carried

it out practically with the utmost spirit. So he was first forgiven, then consoled, and finally petted and made much of, as though he were a superior being lent to the family for a little while, subject to immediate withdrawal if not treated according to his merits. He was sunshiny and caressing the whole time, abundant in small services and pleasant concessions, very chatty and cheerful about his past faults, and proclaiming, without the slightest hesitation, that he did not go there, or do this; that he declined that invitation, and avoided the other introduction, "because, you know, I want to keep myself out of harm's way." At the end of the year a situation was offered to him in a great banking-house in the north of England. He agreed to all that his mother and Sydney said when they anxiously discussed the matter with him, and he finally acquiesced in their acceptance of the situation, and said, with a slight sigh, that he had no doubt he should like it very much. They told him that the work would be monotonous, and the pay small; that he must make up his mind manfully to encounter disagreeables, and to sacrifice self-indulgence; that they felt keenly for all that he would have to go through; that he might rely on their keeping their eyes open, and doing everything in their power to forward his interests, either in this or in any other and better line which might possibly open before him;

that they did not underrate his annoyances, but that any kind of work must be better for him than idleness and dependence at home. And Robert said "yes" to everything. His sisters cried when they wished him good-bye, and thought it was a great pity that he could not be always at home, and he quite agreed with them.

"He is young of his age," observed Sydney to his mother, afterwards; "he will be more thoughtful by and by."

"I think you hardly do him justice," replied Mrs. Lennard. "He has become much more thoughtful during this past year. Home influence has done him a great deal of good, and I have had several most satisfactory conversations with him."

Such was the history of the hero, whose unexpected appearance in — Street was hailed with unequivocal delight by his mother and sisters. He told them that he had got leave of absence, and they were charmed to hear it. But before they sat down to dinner he had insinuated a slip of paper into Jessy's hand, on which he had written the words, "Stay behind; I have something to say to you;" and this was the reason why Jessy was uncomfortable in her mind. She had been for some time past increasingly his correspondent and his confidant, and she knew that matters at the banking-house were not quite so smooth as they seemed, at

least, as far as regarded one assistant-clerk in the establishment. She dreaded the after-dinner communication in store for her, though she was a little proud, too, of being the individual selected to receive it.

“And you don’t know when Syd is coming up?” said Robert, as the dessert was placed upon the table.

“We know nothing about him,” replied Mrs. Lennard, with a shortness of manner familiar to her children, and indicating a little unexpected annoyance, which they were always most anxious to disperse.

“Oh, mamma!” cried Emily, “why, we know that he’s at Northborough, and that he has got a very serious case there, which may detain him a long time.”

“Summoned by telegram,” said Mrs. Lennard, with a little pride.

“Ah!” exclaimed Robert, “he’s coming into notice. I’ve heard of him two or three times lately, from people who had no idea that we were related. I suppose he’s making no end of money?”

“He is very open about it,” replied Mrs. Lennard, with a smile. “His practice is steadily increasing. This last year’s income was one-third more than the preceding.”

“Uncommonly jolly, I should say,” observed Robert, “to have a third more money than you

know how to spend. I suppose he'll invest a lot of it in microscopes and artificial backbones, and other contrivances for dispensing with one's natural constitution, if one likes somebody else's better. I wish he'd come to me for a few hints!"

"He is going to give us all a trip to the seaside," said Emily; "and oh! Robert, I do hope your leave will last long enough for you to come with us."

Robert made no answer.

"We mustn't tempt him from his work," said Mrs. Lennard; "but it *would* be a treat to have him too, certainly. What do you say about it, Bertie?"

"I can't say anything just yet, mamma, but we'll see what can be done. I should like uncommonly to superintend the girls at a watering-place, provided it wasn't too big a one. A small watering-place, in the season, is my highest notion of human felicity."

"Why in the world should you say that?" asked his mother. "I would much rather go out of the season, if it wasn't for the girls; and, as it is, I'm thankful to be a little too late for the crush."

"Oh, but it's such a lark! Everybody makes a regular business of gaiety. It's a point of conscience to get through as much of it in a given time as you can. Then you may do exactly what you like, wear out all your old clothes

without being brought to book for it, or try fantastic experiments in costume, and carry them off with an air, as if they were the last London fashion. The residents are so grateful to the visitors for a few hints on dress, and for a little gentle compulsion in the way of amusement. Then I enjoy the balls frightfully. It's such fun dancing in an empty room. And you're safe to find at least half-a-dozen pretty girls in such nice clean frocks, that it's a treat to look at them. Men are in such request, too. Don't I know how the stewards snap at the strangers, when there's a regular stock of used-up partners, who provide for themselves, and don't choose to be introduced. Gods of war, from the dépôt, perhaps, who have it all their own way, and think no end of themselves, till they are ordered off to some bigger place, and find out how much smaller they are than they thought themselves."

"But, Bertie," cried Jessy, laughing, and feeling sure that he would not rattle on in this fashion if there were anything seriously amiss, "I should have expected that sort of thing to be a little unpleasant. You find yourself eclipsed, you know, and the pretty girls in the clean frocks like to dance with somebody else."

"Poor things! so they do," he answered; "but I gloat inwardly over the sense of their delusion. When I see them all contending for

the smiles of some muff of a fellow, who doesn't know a lady when he sees one, and isn't fit to speak ten words to her, if he did know her—”

Here both his sisters cried shame upon him, and assured him that he knew nothing about girls. They never contended for the smiles of any man.

“Don't they?” asked he, meekly. “Oh! that's my mistake, then. But, do you know, it's so odd—I fancied I had seen it done.”

“Not when you were superintending your sisters, I hope,” observed Mrs. Lennard, with a well-satisfied smile.

“No, no; don't talk of such a thing,” he answered, well knowing that the ground wouldn't bear a joke in that direction. “If I were to see the faintest symptom of such immorality in my sisters, I should report it to you instantly, and I know you'd shut them up for life.”

“I am not afraid,” said she; “but, Bertie, it's very well to laugh, yet I think there's a vast deal of truth in your nonsense. I have no patience with the airs which dancing men give themselves now-a-days, or with the way in which the young ladies bear it. I don't know what would become of me, if I were to see one of my girls submitting to be left off and resumed again at pleasure, as I see others.”

At these words the two girls exchanged a

little furtive glance, which said plainly enough, “ Dear mamma ! it’s half her fancy ; but we’ll take good care not to vex her about it.”

Mrs. Lennard stood up, and made a little speech before she left the dining-room. She was in the habit of haranguing the family now and then upon her favourite subjects. “ Flirts I dislike,” said she ; “ but in my day flirts were sentimental, and now they are fast, which is far worse. I hate and abhor a fast young lady. Conventionalities, indeed !” (She was evidently annihilating an adversary ; but as no adversary was audible, her eloquence had rather a spasmodic and surprising effect, and almost made you jump.) “ Don’t talk to me about conventionalities ! Conventionalities are the only safeguards on earth. I never knew a woman despise conventionalities unless she had a bad motive for it. I have no pity for scrapes. I’ll tell you what always goes before a scrape—a fault ; and a fault which might always be avoided by a little discretion and dignity. Don’t tell me about liberality and good-nature ! I object to liberality and good-nature ! I prefer principles !”

“ Hear, hear, hear ! Bravo, mamma !” cried Robert, stooping to kiss her as he held the door open for her. “ I neyer heard an old lady talk so like a good book in my life, and I hope those two young ladies will profit by it.”

Mrs. Lennard patted his cheek, laughing.

"You are a saucy boy," said she; "but I am right, for all that." And she went out of the room highly pleased with her son, and a little angry with her daughters—not because they contradicted her, for they had not dreamed of such a thing—but because she thought it just possible that they might have contradicted her if she had not been a little angry.

We have now learned one of Mrs. Lennard's inflexible notions. Free and easy as were the habits and hours of her household, she had the most profound and unalterable respect for conventional rules of propriety, and the most invincible suspicion and mistrust of all who violated them. You might as well have tried to persuade her that Oliver Cromwell was Pope Joan in disguise, as that a young lady who sat on the stairs with her partner could ever come to a good end. She had described her own experience very fairly, and the answer to her might have been, "Perhaps, if you *had* ever known a woman who violated conventional rules from a good motive, you might change your opinion."

Robert Lennard sauntered back to the dining-table, and began chipping off little bits of biscuit, and dropping them slowly into a water-glass. Presently it occurred to him to try whether he could hit one of these bits of biscuit with another, just as it plunged into the water. He found it very difficult to be quick enough about this, but

he was anxiously doing his best, and with a fair prospect of success, when Jessy came back to him.

“ Well, Bertie dear,” she said, with her hand on his shoulder, “ what is it ? ”

He turned and faced her, gloomily enough.



CHAPTER VIII.

CONSPIRACY.

C

HAT is it, Bertie dear?"

"Why, you'll be sorry to hear it, and so am I ; but it couldn't be helped. I'm out of place again, Jessy."

"Out of place?" repeated she, puzzled.

"Yes," he continued, recovering his fluency as soon as the worst was told ; "the fact is, I couldn't stand it any longer, and it's not possible to explain it to you—a girl couldn't enter into the sort of thing ; but you must just take my word for it that it wasn't the kind of life that a gentleman could stand. And so I've given it all up—that's to say, it's just the same as if I'd given it all up. It's all over, that's what I mean ; and here I am!"

"Oh dear, dear!" began Jessy. "Oh ! poor mamma, how shall you tell her?"

"Now, don't, there's a good child!" cried Robert, giving her a little friendly shake ; "there's not a bit of use in crying over it ; I want you to

make the best of it. You know it's harder upon me than upon anybody. I'm the chief sufferer, and you ought to try to soften it to me as much as you can. I hope you're not going to be selfish about it. If you are, I shall be sorry I told you, and I shall take good care not to tell you anything again."

Jessy was very meek, and she was anxious not to be selfish; so she accepted this view of the matter without questioning, and only asked what she was to do.

"Well," said Robert, in a slightly provoked tone, "that's just what I'm going to tell you. You see I don't intend for a moment to be a burden upon my family. I have a prospect of employment much more suitable to me in every way; in fact, just the sort of thing I should like. But I don't want mamma to know anything at all about it till I'm safe; and that's the difficulty."

"But, Bertie dear, I'm quite sure mamma would not have you do anything ungentlemanly for the world. If you'll only explain to her that ungentleman-like conduct was expected of you, I'm sure she'll think it quite right and proper that you should have resigned your situation."

"Pshaw!" cried he, half-ashamed, half-laughing, "it's not precisely that; but never mind about it. You know, look at it which way you will, it must be a blow to my mother, and——"

"Yes," said Jessy, gravely, "a great blow and a sad, sad disappointment for us all."

"That's exactly what I was saying," replied he, impatiently. "Why should you take the words out of my mouth, and go harping upon the gloomy side of the question? It's so like a woman."

Jessy began to cry.

"There now!" he exclaimed; "it's enough to drive a fellow mad!"

But he could not bear to see tears, and he was very sorry for having caused them, so he coaxed her, and petted her, and soothed her, till she was composed; scolding her a little throughout, and pointing out to her that she was not a child, and that he had expected more sense from her, and that this was not exactly the way in which she ought to behave if she wanted to be a comfort to him; and Jessy felt the justice of the rebuke, and assured him that she *did* want to be a comfort to him if he would only show her how.

"That's a darling," said he. "I know you do. My little Jessy's all right, I know; and I didn't mean to be cross to you, but these kind of worries do try a fellow's temper, as you would know if you were a man. You women are so lucky; nothing ever happens to worry you. Now look here. The situation I am looking out for is a secretaryship—better pay, pleasanter work, just the kind of thing I want, in fact—and I've

a very good chance of it. But I shall have to go out of town for a day or two next week to make sure about it, and I don't want to tell mamma a word till I come back. It will be so much more comfortable to her, don't you see, not to know anything has gone wrong till I am able to tell her that it's all right again, and much better than it was before."

No argument was needed to convince Jessy of this. She and Emily were amiable girls, and they were devoted to their mother. They were so accustomed to see Sydney quietly moulding the occurrences of every day, so as to shield her from every passing annoyance, whether at his own expense or at theirs, that it had become quite a matter of course to them to do the same; and almost any mode of encountering a difficulty which should preserve her from being vexed by it, would have seemed right to Jessy. So Robert went on smoothly—

"Now, what I want you to do for me is this. Of course my mother mustn't know where I am gone, and if any letters come for me, *you* must just get possession of them and forward them. It'll be all right afterwards, you know, for as soon as I come back I shall tell her all about it."

Jessy thought she could manage to do this.

"Well," he continued, "there's one thing more. If a Liverpool letter comes for *anybody*, I want it kept back. Don't you see the people

there might write disagreeably and give their own view of the matter, and worry my mother to death before I could explain it away. And I would rather keep the whole thing quiet till I can make it all straight. Now, I hope you're not going to be tiresome."

"But, Bertie dear, I think Syd will be at home before you want to go, and he will settle it all so much better than I can."

"No, no, no; not at all!" cried Bertie; "you can settle it better than anybody else in the world, if you'll just be a good girl and do as I tell you. I don't want Syd to know a word about it. Not a word, do you understand? It's my secret, and I've told it you quite in confidence, and you're not to give anybody a hint of it. That's upon honour."

Jessy looked very much troubled, but she was afraid to say that she had any scruples of conscience in the matter.

"I don't in the least know how I can do it," said she, slowly.

"Nothing in the world easier," he answered. "If you hadn't been the president of the post-office I shouldn't have troubled you in the matter. But you're only to look for the Liverpool post-mark on any letter, and slip it into your pocket if you find it. There's nothing to be downhearted about, you know. Would I ask you to do what was the least dishonourable? you *know* I wouldn't."

It's just to keep back a letter for a week at the outside ; and very likely, you know, it may never come at all, only it's as well to be on one's guard."

There was a box for letters attached to the street-door, and it was Jessy's special business, as soon as the postman's knock was heard, to go out, empty the box, and distribute its contents to the family circle round the breakfast-table. This was so completely an institution in the household that nothing short of an illness which should cause Jessy to keep her bed was likely to interfere with it. So that it was quite true that she could manage the matter if she would. She was a warm-hearted, right-minded, good sort of girl, with sense and conscience up to the average pitch which they attain in well-educated girls with no peculiarities of temperament or training, between the ages of fifteen and twenty. That is to say, she was anxious to do right, and she was likely to do right if she was left to herself, but she was quite capable of being hoodwinked and made to do wrong by others whom she respected and loved. And she had not the faintest notion of reasoning about anything. If she had tried to tell you her reason for doing, abstaining, or thinking, in any matter whatsoever, she would have found herself in a terrible entanglement straightway. What she would have told you would probably not have been her reason at all in the first place ; and in the second, it would

assuredly not have had the slightest connection with the matter in hand. And if you had argued her out of it, which would not have been at all difficult, the process would not have affected her opinion one way or the other. We have our private conviction that this undeniable characteristic of young females is not peculiar to them as such, but that it belongs to them as young human beings, and is quite as frequently to be found in their brothers as in themselves. "Most girls are naturally stupid," says the "Saturday Review," and we only ask leave to finish the sentence by adding, "and most boys also." But amongst the many defects and inconsistencies in the popular mode of judging such matters, we select one, in passing, for a special protest. Because a girl is charming under twenty, she is judged as if her mind and character had come to their full maturity; and because boys at that age are avowedly horrid and disagreeable, it is said that they are not to be judged at all, but that you are to wait till they are grown up. We think this extremely unfair. Let it be said rather that the immature female mind is fascinating, and the immature male mind repulsive. Nobody will deny that, we should hope! And as for comparing them after they come to maturity, that may, perhaps, be done whenever the day comes that the educational training of a woman is made as careful and thorough as that of a man, and

extended as far; that is to say, up to three-and-twenty. Till then they are not upon equal ground, and ought not to be compared at all after eighteen.

Robert, who was, be it remembered, four years older than Jessy, persuaded her now with some difficulty to do as he wished. He told her that he had a right to settle his own affairs, and that she had no responsibility in this at all, because, as it *was* his own affair, her business was simply to do what he told her. That she was a dear good little thing, and would save them all from discomfort, and mamma especially from an amount of vexation which was very bad for her at her age, and might, very probably, make her seriously ill. That there was no deception in it, *because* it would all be over in a week. And that it was precisely the same sort of thing as that which happened every other day of her life, when Syd said to her, and she knew how often he said it, "No, we'll not do that, for fear it should vex mamma." And she contradicted none of it, but felt excessively uncomfortable, and was chiefly conscious of a strong wish that no letter from Liverpool might arrive during the fatal week.

"And now," said Robert, "as perhaps we shan't have another opportunity, I'll give you the address at once, that you may know where to send my letters when I go out of town." He took a card out of his pocket-book and gave it to her.

"Take care of it; 'there's a good child,'" added he. "Put it away in some safe place directly. I should be in an awful mess if you were to lose it after I'm gone."

Jessy read the address on the card—

F. RIVERS, Esq.,
FENBURY PARK,
FENBURY, ——SHIRE.

"So that's the gentleman to whom you're to be secretary," said she, thoughtfully.

"Well, I hope so," he answered. "He seems to be a regular scientific old buffer with a lot of hobbies. Wants copying, and verifying, and arranging, and investigating, and all the rest of it. Thinks the correspondence highly satisfactory, but must have an experimental interview of two or three days' duration before he can quite make up his mind. Oh, gooroo! Just fancy! An interview lasting three days! I shall be dead and buried before it's half over; but *that* can't be helped. The only comfort is that he *can't* work so long at me without developing something good out of me, and I only hope he'll tell me what it is, that I may know my own strong points in future. I wish I knew what he was going to do at me. Perhaps he'll try some new chemical tests upon me, and I shall be hurt. I'm horribly nervous, I know that. Heaven send he isn't the

least lively, for a three days' conversation with a lively, scientific, old man, *must* terminate in insanity!"

"What nonsense you *do* talk!" said Jessy, laughing, and wonderfully relieved and refreshed by being made to laugh. "But, Bertie dear, *do* tell me——"

"Talking secrets?" said Mrs. Lennard, entering the room. They drew a little away from each other, and looked guilty. "How I *do* dislike," continued Mrs. Lennard, "to have the conversation come to a full stop as soon as I open the door. Of course I know that you can have nothing to talk about which you don't wish me to hear; but that sudden pause gives me an uncomfortable sensation, and it isn't a well-bred sort of thing, even in your own family, I assure you, my dears."

"Now, mamma, that's a shame, and I won't have it," shouted Robert. "How do you know that we're not planning a birthday present for you? But I'm so glad you came in, for I was just wondering what had become of you, as I've lots to talk about. I only kept Jessy because I really can't keep my tongue quiet, and I knew you wanted your nap up-stairs. But since you *are* awake, come along, and we'll have a regular coze."

Off he carried her in triumph, and Jessy followed, silent and self-reproached.

When Sydney Lennard arrived in London,

his first step was to go to Elbury, the jeweller. Mr. Elbury was in attendance in the shop himself. He was an elderly man, with a smooth, florid face, a vast amount of whisker, and remarkably vague, placid, dreamy eyes. He spoke through his teeth, and was always faintly smiling, like a superior being to whom the vagaries of such mortals as really expected him to do a little business for them were subjects of mild amusement.

“I think,” said Sydney, walking straight up to him, “you undertook to receive letters for a gentleman of the name of Lennard?”

Mr. Elbury looked gently at him, and was dumb.

“My name is Lennard,” continued Sydney. “Oh, indeed, sir,” responded Mr. Elbury, in a slow, hazy voice, “I should not be surprised if you might happen to be the party yourself, for I haven’t exactly a habit of remembering, and yet I think I may be mistaken.”

“I am not the party myself,” said Sydney.

“Ah, indeed, sir, just my impression; only I rather shrink from placing confidence in my impressions.”

“But I want to know his present address,” continued Sydney.

“Were you in any particular hurry, sir?”

“Yes, in a very particular hurry.”

“Then perhaps you’ll be good enough to

leave the letter. I can't exactly charge my memory with the address, but I shall not fail to forward the letter."

"That won't do," said Sydney; "I want the address. I have not the letter with me."

Mr. Elbury fidgetted helplessly about a drawer for a minute or two. "Perhaps, sir," suggested he, "you could be so kind as to send the letter, I will undertake to affix the address to it."

"But I should like to be sure that you *have* the address," persisted Sydney.

"Well, sir, that's natural. But you see the truth is I don't remember anything about it, and I fear I am only wasting your time. We shall be sure to find it by and by."

"Have any letters arrived for Mr. Lennard?" asked Sydney.

"I think I can venture to say none," replied Mr. Elbury, deliberately. "If any letters had arrived, I *must* have seen them, and I don't think it's probable that I should have made any blunder about them."

"Well," said Sydney, quietly, "perhaps you will oblige me by looking for the address now till you find it."

He sat down, and Mr. Elbury made a few more feeble demonstrations about another drawer, looking from time to time at his tormentor with a kind of bland despair.

"Did you happen to have any other business elsewhere, sir?" asked he at last with a deep sigh, "because if you could call in as you return, I dare say my boy would be come in by that time, and he might possibly be more successful in satisfying you than I am."

"I have no other business, and I can wait," replied Sydney, very composedly.

It seemed to be a great relief to the persecuted one when a lady customer came into the shop, and he was compelled to attend to her for a few moments. But when Sydney heard him assure her that he was "quite out of studs," he, Sydney, seeing a tray of those useful articles in no very inconspicuous place on the counter, could not help taking them up and exhibiting them. Mr. Elbury's chronic smile underwent a slight increase. "It seems, sir," observed he, sweetly, "that you are better acquainted with the geography of my articles than I am myself."

After several more futile attempts to avoid selling what the lady wanted, and after being finally brought to bay by her and Sydney (who interested himself a good deal in the transaction) and actually driven into tying up a parcel with a very loose bow and ends, Mr. Elbury sat down to rest, the customer having departed.

"Do you remember this Mr. Lennard?" asked Sydney.

"Well, sir, was he a stout party with

spectacles, and rather a particular white beard?"

"I think not," said Sydney.

"Then," said Mr. Elbury, decidedly, and as if it was a comfort to him to settle the question, "he was a *very* thin young gentleman, who limped."

At this happy moment the "boy" entered the shop, and Mr. Elbury caught at him as a drowning man might catch at a straw, feebly and aimlessly, yet with all his might.

"This gentleman," said he, "is inquiring for a Mr. Stanton, who left letters here; can you remember anything about the circumstances, and what the letters were for?"

"For a Mr. Lennard, who left his direction here that letters might be forwarded to him," interposed Sydney.

"Mr. Lennard, sir; yes, sir," replied the boy, as sharp as a squib; "A. H., Post-office, Fenbury. To be left till called for."

"No letters came for him, I think," observed Mr. Elbury.

"Beg your pardon, sir, there was several, and one on 'em was a telegram."

"Oh! ah! yes! I remember," said Mr. Elbury, a languid light coming into his eyes, "there was rather an unlucky mistake about that telegram. It went into the country with a parcel of plate, and when it came back it was so long

afterwards that I didn't think it was worth while to forward it."

Sydney did *not* strike him, and he went tranquilly on.

"Where did I keep the card and the memoranda, Thomas? *was* there a card, and *were* there any memoranda, do you think?"

"Little box, third shelf, inside the green baize doors," answered the boy, instantly.

Mr. Elbury unlocked the doors and the box, and handing a paper to Sydney, observed, with a good deal of easy dignity, "I'm afraid, sir, you'll not carry away a very favourable impression of my accuracy."

Sydney read the words on the paper.

"All letters for F. Lennard, Esq., to be forwarded immediately to A. H., Post-office, Fennybury, —shire. To be left till called for."

Under this direction, which was written in a bold, masculine hand, there were a few pencil notes which Sydney deciphered with difficulty, and did not clearly understand when he had deciphered them. "Blonde, hurried, handsome, —small triangular scar on the back of right hand; clearly military, but with no lisp; stares very much; perhaps a duel."

"Ah," said Mr. Elbury, looking over his shoulder; "I remember now, those are my wife's notes. She is always very much exhilarated under the idea of a mystery, and she thought——"

he suddenly stopped short with a curious expression of surprise in his face, which caused him to look almost intelligent for a moment.

“I must trouble you for that card, if you please, sir,” added he after a pause, and in an altered voice, “and you must excuse me for saying that I decline answering any further questions or giving any further information.”

“Certainly,” replied Sydney. “There is the card. Good morning to you, and many thanks.”

“I am so glad that I recollect,” said Mr. Elbury, rubbing his hands after Sydney was gone. “Mr. Lennard particularly desired me not to mention his name, or give any sort of information about him to anybody. It is uncommonly lucky that I remembered.”



CHAPTER IX.

A PORTRAIT.



YDNEY called at the Hendersons' before he went home, and ascertained that they were out of town, but that they were expected very shortly. He reckoned that he should have time to see and to sound them before he carried his own household off for that winter treat at the sea-side which the girls were anticipating so eagerly. He counted up the scraps of information which he had acquired, and noted them carefully in his private memorandum book, as follows:—

“Name, Adrian Harford, or Lennard. Light-haired man with moustaches. Small triangular scar on the back of right hand. Photograph portrait by Messieurs Pennant of Vere Street. Address given, Post-office, Fenbury. Try Fenbury Park.”

And Fenbury Park he was determined to try as soon as he could arrange with his friend Ferrars, to get another holiday. Chance favoured him in this respect, for when he went to receive his

friend's medical report, Ferrars said that he was going away for a fortnight in the course of the following week, and that if Sydney wanted any more spare days he would be obliged to him to take them at once. Sydney thanked him and promised. Sydney did not think it right to tell Helen's story in his family circle, but he told the chief particulars to his mother in private, and was a good deal disappointed by the coldness of her sympathy.

"I hope you are not going to do anything Quixotic," said she; "you are hardly old enough, Syd, to be the protector of distressed damsels of doubtful discretion."

"*They* think me quite old enough," replied Sydney, laughing. "I believe Eva looked upon me as a sort of grandfather."

He imagined that this would disperse his mother's suspicions in a moment, but he never was more mistaken in his life. She answered him quickly—

"I suppose you mean that she was so completely at her ease with you. I thought as much."

"What did you think, my dear mother? Come—out with it!"

"I think," replied she, fondly, "that you are the best-hearted, kindest, most unselfish creature that ever was born, and that you know about as much of the world now as you did when you were born."

Knowledge of the world was one of Mrs. Lennard's strongest points. Nobody could dislike wickedness more than she did, but she was

proud to think that she understood it thoroughly, and that she was quite as capable of guarding her sons from it as of keeping her daughters out of it. She believed that she knew an indifferent character at a glance, and great would have been the wonder of some of the most harmless people who passed her in the streets, if they could have divined what she supposed them to be, and where she thought they were going. There was a very respectable city missionary who often crossed her path, and whom she entirely believed to be a billiard-marker. What the precise combination of circumstances was which had originally led to the mistake, it is not necessary to inquire; suffice it to say that the mistake had been made, and that she had seen billiard-marking in his unconscious face ever afterwards. She was not quite clear in her secret soul as to the details of the practice of billiard-marking, but she knew, in a general way, that it was a sort of swindling. I believe she thought that it was a system of secret signals for the instruction of billiard-swindlers.

Sydney scarcely ever contradicted her. He was in the habit of allowing for all her little peculiarities with a kind of respectful tenderness which hardly admitted them even to himself, and which entirely ignored them to her. Nothing could be more conducive to harmony than this practice, and as yet it had led to very little inconvenience of any sort. He would not have taken his own-

way in spite of her, unless he had thought it a positive duty to do so, and when he came to examine the question he generally found it to be a preference, not a duty, that was moving him, and then he gave it up. She on her part, being a thoroughly good and affectionate woman, frequently thought over Sydney's habits, wishes, and ways, so far as she understood them, and settled with herself that he ought to be borne with on this point and indulged on that; and then she would forestall or succumb to him when he least expected it, and by so doing help to keep up the warmth and the strength of that feeling of gratitude towards her which was never absent from his mind. Still, it would have been better if he had spoken out more frequently, even at the cost of a little temporary discord. She would have been annoyed if she could have guessed how much and how often he constrained himself for her sake, and she would have been still more annoyed if she had known how often he did the thing he wished without mentioning it, in order to avoid opposing her. For we know that absolute confidence was one of the things which she expected from her children. There was another thing which she expected, and the communication of which the reader may possibly by this time anticipate, if her character has begun to reveal itself. If an occasion should arise on which her will was fairly and openly in opposition to the will of one of her children, she

expected to conquer. No one could deprecate such an occasion more earnestly; no one could be more eager to avoid it, to delay it, or to soften it by every possible preliminary device of concession or explanation. But still if the contest were to come, she expected to have the best of it.

Sydney did not intend to abandon his *protégées* to her suspicions, and therefore he answered her with his usual pleasant smile.

"Never mind my ignorance of the world, mamma. You'll allow that I know a little of medicine. And I can tell you that this poor girl was really almost in a dying state, and that I think I've cured her. I can tell you, too, that there was a most respectable elderly physician, who has had every chance of knowing the world, and has made the most of his chances, and who thought of the two young ladies exactly as I do."

"Then, my dear," said Mrs. Lennard, "I strongly advise you to leave them to the respectable elderly physician. He is a much fitter person to look after them than you are."

The result of this dialogue was that Sydney resolved to go down to Fenbury without saying anything about it. He inquired about Robert. "Emily tells me that he came up the day before yesterday. Nothing amiss, I hope?"

"No," replied Mrs. Lennard, "I hope not. He speaks of nothing amiss, and he seems in excellent spirits. He is gone out of town again for

a few days on some business. I imagine it is something about which he is confidentially employed by the firm; and if so, you know it is a proof that they are satisfied with him."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Sydney, with anxious eyes, but with a voice of eager assent. "Where is he?"

"He did not say where he was going. It is only for two or three days. When he comes back you can talk to him. But I think, Syd, you must be a little on your guard with him. He feels himself to be a man now, you know, and I think he is a little sensitive about being interfered with."

"Oh! I'll not come the elder brother over him," answered Sydney, laughing; "trust me for that."

A curious under-current of sympathy in uneasiness was discernible in all that passed between Mrs. Lennard and her elder son on the subject of Robert's position and prospects. I call it an under-current, because both were equally desirous to keep it well below the surface. Yet whenever they talked about Robert's future, Sydney looked doubtful, and his mother began to be mildly on the defensive. Her actions, however, betrayed what her words were so carefully arranged to conceal. The amount of precaution which she was willing to take—the air of gravity with which she opened a letter from Robert, and

of relief with which she laid it down, having found no mischief in it—the complacency with which she recorded every little instance of his steadiness which came under her notice—all these things showed precisely that feeling of insecurity in her own mind, which she was so prompt to resent when she detected it in any other.

Sydney went to Messieurs Pennant, in Vere Street, to be photographed before he started for Fenbury.

“On what scale, sir?” inquired the operator, an aggressively self-satisfied little man—“carte or vignette? We do a good deal in vignettes. They are not so trying as the carte where there is any little deficiency in natural elegance, and you know, sir, we don’t presume to pretend to supply the deficiencies of nature.”

“You have a great many sitters,” observed Sydney, as he suffered himself to be posed.

“Well, sir, the brotherhood of photographers prospers just now. We are very little annoyed now by the brush artists. We have educated our public, sir, and they appreciate us. I may say that the brush artists have pretty nearly withdrawn from competition.”

“You executed a vignette of a gentleman named Harford, five or six months ago, I believe,” said Sydney when he was finished, and when Mr. Pennant, having produced what he pronounced to be a “most satisfactory negative under the circum-

stances," was in high good humour. "Can you remember anything about it? It was coloured."

"We can hardly be expected to charge our memory with individuals, sir," said the little man, with a deprecatory flourish of his fingers.

"May I look through your stock of prints?" asked Sydney, as a last hope.

"Certainly, sir. We keep them in months. Each portfolio has a month's sittings; but we do not preserve a longer period than a year. There, sir," opening a large cabinet, "are the months of the past year, and you are quite welcome to examine them at your leisure."

Sydney sat down to his work, and began to turn over the contents of one portfolio after another, very deliberately and carefully. At last he came upon a face which reminded him of the face he sought, though there was so marked a difference between the uncoloured print and the finished miniature that he felt considerable doubt whether they were indeed from the same original. There was more strength and less effeminacy in the vignette which he held in his hand, but there was also far less sweetness. Indeed there seemed to him to be a lurking expression of cruelty about the slightly parted lips, which recalled to his remembrance a certain picture of Cæsar Borgia, by Titian, which no man who has once fairly looked at it would ever be likely to forget, so strange and subtle is the ferocity which couches beneath its tranquil

beauty. Sydney looked long at this unsatisfactory face, and then handed it to Mr. Pennant, who, having finished three or four sitters in the interval, had come into the outer room for a moment to see how Sydney was getting on. "I believe," said he, "this is the portrait I want, but I can't be quite sure, as the vignette which I saw was a highly-finished miniature."

"Settle the point for you in a moment, sir," answered the brisk little man. "Method, sir, method is our madness, or rather our mania, as— as the poet might have said if he had done as large a business as we do. Number two thousand and seventy-three, you observe, sir. And here we find it. (He was turning over the pages of a huge account-book while he spoke.) Number two thousand and seventy-three. Gentleman purchased his own negative. We can let you have that print, sir, if you please; it was kept, I see, as being a particularly fine specimen. It's not often we get the half-tint so perfect. But I beg your pardon, sir. I perceive there is a mistake. This is not in the name of Harford."

"What is the name, may I ask?" said Sydney.

"This is a Captain Rivers," replied Mr. Pennant. "Parcel to be sent to the United Service Club. No London address given."

Sydney was ashamed to say that Captain Rivers would suit him quite as well as Mr. Har-

ford; so after looking at the vignette a little longer, he murmured something about his keen admiration of the half-tint, and bought it.

“Guessed you were an amateur, sir,” said Mr. Pennant, eyeing him sharply as he handed over the print. “Couldn’t possibly supply you with a better standard. Flesh absolutely perfect. You try to come up to that, sir, in your studio at home, and I take upon me to say that you will become better acquainted with your own deficiencies, which is the great thing for amateurs, than if you were to work for a year without a standard. Good morning, sir.”

Sydney was well satisfied with his morning’s work. He added the name of Captain Rivers to his private memoranda, and put the photograph carefully away in his pocket-book.

“There is no end to this fellow’s aliases,” said he to himself—“Jermyn, Lennard, Harford—but I think I’ve nailed him at last. Rivers is the name; but what relation he bears to Mr. Rivers, of Fenbury Park, and whether that gentleman’s letter was written in genuine ignorance, or was only a blind, how much there is to be found out at Fenbury, and how I am to find it out, or what I’m to do if I can’t find it out—these are unanswered questions. However, there is no doubt as to the first step; I must survey the country.”

On the morning of the day which he had

fixed for his expedition to Fenbury he received a note from Eva.

"**M**Y DEAR FRIEND,"—(thus she began. She was a warm, impulsive, fearless little creature, and it was quite a comfort to her to write the words. She had considered the question of a proper opening to her letter, and had said to herself, very decidedly, "it would be the most ungrateful thing in the world *not* to call him my friend.")—"Helen is really better. She sat up yesterday evening for more than a quarter of an hour; she sleeps much better; I think baby comforts her. She has tried to talk to me a good deal, but you said that I must not let her, and I told her what you said, and how ill she had been; I took care not to frighten her, and told her she was *much* better and *quite* out of danger; and I begged her to promise me not to talk about troubles and anxieties till you gave her leave; and at last she promised; but she wants to begin very much. Will you please say when she may begin? I don't mind it myself, and I rather think it will be good for her now to pour out a little; but you must judge. We have had no letters at all from anybody. Can you think of anything that we ought to do?

"I hope you are safe at home; I think so much of what you did for us, and I am quite ashamed to remember how quietly we took it;

but you are very kind, and I am sure you know that I was hardly able to understand anything, because I was so anxious ; but I do wish I had said more to you at last, and I do hope so very much that you don't think me ungrateful. Helen hardly understands yet ; but she will thank you so much when she begins to know what you have done for her. I wish there was any hope that we could ever be able to do the least thing in the world for you.

“ Believe me always

“ Truly and gratefully yours,

“ EVA LAKE.”

“ *P.S.* We have made a new acquaintance since you went. He is very good-natured, and sends fruit for Helen, *only he is so—*”

The four last words were erased, but not so as to be illegible, and Sydney was left to finish by conjecture the sentence which Eva had recalled when half-written. He felt great trouble of mind about this new acquaintance who was so good-natured about fruit, and so something else not to be expressed. His first impulse was to write instantly and forbid all acquaintance during his absence. Then he laughed at himself. He was considering the matter as if the two girls really belonged to him, and were to be disposed of at his pleasure. What was it to him if another man

chose to be kind to them? Ought he not to rejoice if they made friends, and to be very well content if they were taken off his hands? No; he dismissed that idea in a moment. Eva's extreme youth, beauty, and ignorance, rendered her unprotected position most dangerous. She was wholly unfit to judge for herself. It would be utterly heartless in him to avoid the trouble of judging for her now that he had been so strangely brought into connection with her. He had not sought the charge, but it would be unmanly to elude it; so he wrote his answer at once, and determined to pay his promised visit to Northborough with as little delay as possible:—

“**MY DEAR MISS LAKE**,—I rejoice in your good report; pray keep me very fully informed. I think you may now encourage your sister to talk a little of her troubles with benefit to herself; but you must watch her very carefully. Do not let such conversations last too long, or recur too often. Stop at once if she becomes excited; and if you find her exhausted and depressed after the indulgence, try to escape allowing it again. I know all this is very difficult, but it is the best advice I can give you. I don’t think that a good fit of crying now and then will do her harm; it may very likely relieve her a little. The first experiment will, however, in great measure decide the point. You must see

whether she sleeps better or worse, whether she is at all feverish, whether she is less capable of exertion after giving way. If the after-symptoms are such as to indicate that the conversation did her harm rather than good, I advise you to tell her so quite openly, and refer to those symptoms as a reason for refusing the indulgence in future. You ask me if there is anything you can do ? I wish you to learn as much from your sister about the circumstances of her marriage as you possibly can, and to report it to me, trusting me not to reveal it unnecessarily, and to make the best use I can of it. I hope you won't think that I am asking you to be treacherous. If you can contrive to look upon me as really and sincerely your *friend*, anxious only to help your sister, but unable to do so without your assistance, I think you will trust me to help her even in spite of herself. There is another little bit of advice which I want to give you, and by which I hope you won't be offended. Be *very* careful about making new acquaintance. Please tell me the name and address of the gentleman who sends fruit, and in what manner you were introduced to him. May I venture to say that in your sister's unhappy position you ought not for the present to receive any visitors ? I hope you will not think that I am taking too great a liberty, or that I mean to blame you. If you were five years older you might safely be trusted to judge for

yourself. I am rather angry with you for not telling me how you are yourself. I hope you don't forget any of your promises, and I hope you have not been tearing any more books.

“The Hendersons are not in London, so you are safe for the present. I think I understood you to say that they do not know the real name of your sister's husband. I believe that I do, but I will tell you nothing till I am a little more secure. The points on which I chiefly want information relate to the two marriages. I want dates, places, and witnesses.

“If you have not yet received a remittance, I can easily advance you a little money.

“I am not quite sure how soon I shall be able to make another holiday and come down to Northborough. In the meantime you would do me a great favour by drawing back from any new acquaintance. It is not possible to explain to you precisely why I ask this. I must again reckon upon your trusting me.

“Good-bye and good hope, for your bulletin is really most encouraging.

“Faithfully yours,

“SYDNEY LENNAED.”

Sydney was obliged to write this letter at full speed before starting for Fenbury. In the railway-carriage he thought it over deliberately, and wished for the power of altering every sentence

in it. It was too abrupt, too formal, too familiar, too authoritative, yet not sufficiently trenchant on the subject of the fruit-giving gentleman. It was nearly everything that it ought not to be.



CHAPTER X.

EV A ' S A D V E N T U R E .

NO heart was ever lighter than Eva's on the day fixed for Helen's first sitting up. When she asked her faint, doubtful question, animated by scarcely the flutter of a hope, "Do you think, darling, you could get as far as the arm-chair this evening?" and when the blessed answer came, "Yes, I should rather like it," she could have broken out into dancing on the spot. In preparation for this great effort—this delicious festival of joy—Helen was to be kept specially quiet all day, and scarcely suffered to move a finger. The extreme tenderness of Eva's anxiety made her cautious and calm; but her face was so full of the eager light of anticipation, that it was wonderful that she was able to put so much restraint upon her manner. Not a particle of impatience or excitement was suffered to escape in voice, gesture, or movement. She was so afraid of disappointing herself, that she hardly ventured to caress Helen

with her usual lavishness, because that gentle wooing of hers sometimes moved the invalid to tears. When she had administered the dose of nourishment which passed under the name of dinner, and had seen it obediently swallowed ; when she had darkened the room, and told the wide, weary eyes that they must close themselves for a little while, because sleep was indispensable as a preliminary to the event of the evening, she stole down-stairs, and went out for her own daily walk—a process which she disliked nearly as much as poor Helen disliked her dinner, but which she was most conscientious in never omitting.

To-day even this tedious task was undertaken with a feeling of ecstasy. She could not tie on her hat without a little song of triumph. She was not able, at that moment, to open her heart to the consideration of any doubts or drawbacks. The poor child had almost persuaded herself that Helen would enjoy the evening as much as herself.

Her present business was to buy a bunch of grapes for Helen's supper, and some little bows of rose-coloured ribbon to trim the snow-white wrapper in which baby was always enveloped when he was carried about the room. Some sort of decoration for baby could not, she thought, be decently omitted on such an occasion as this. Her bit of ribbon was easily found ; but she

determined to buy the grapes on her way home, that they might not lose any of their freshness. She was going to take a "real walk." She had wanted heart for such an enterprise before ; now she had heart enough for anything, and to spare.

Through the town of Northborough ran a navigable river, and at a little distance beyond the limit of the streets this river was enriched by the accession of a stream of moderate breadth, which wandered away among fields and hedge-rows, and had actual trees upon its banks, and big stones, that were almost rocks, in its shallow course. Eva determined within herself that she would visit this stream. She was so anxious to arrive at it, and to get as much of it as she could into her walk, without exceeding her self-imposed limits as to time, that as soon as she was fairly outside the town she began to run at full speed, and went like a deer till she reached the first stile. There were two fields to be crossed before she could get to the water's edge, and she scudded along the first of these without a pause, feeling that it would be a great gain to be out of sight of the road. When she had passed the second stile she sat down on the bank to recover breath, gave one exulting look at the green world around her, and then buried her face in her hands for a moment, and asked herself whether she was really here, out-of-doors, free, and happy, with the great weight lifted off,

to which she had become so accustomed during the recent weeks, that she hardly knew herself without it.

A little sound aroused her—a soft, pleasant, rustling motion, which she knew well. She looked up and laughed. “I do believe,” said she, aloud, “that there is a bird in the hedge.” She went on tiptoe, and peeped; but, with all her care, she could not help startling a very substantial robin, which flew out and perched itself upon the stile, and flaunted its red breast before her eyes like a little banner, and sang at her indignantly. She stood some time looking at it, and enjoying its musical defiance. Then she suddenly discovered a large red and black butterfly—such a grave, sober butterfly—sitting in the grass so quietly, waiting for her. She drew in her skirts, that she might avoid giving it a passing graze, and she stooped down to examine it more closely. While she was stooping, a grasshopper jumped into her hand. This she looked upon as a great piece of luck, and she rose up gently, and carried it carefully some way, and then stooped down again, and waited till it jumped off into the grass. “Now,” she thought, “you are in a new place—miles away, for *you*, from the place in which I found you. I wonder whether *you* are very much surprised! I hope *you* like it. I should like so much to know what *you* thought of my glove, and whether *you* felt

as if you were travelling in a balloon, or whether you knew that a giant had got hold of you. For I am a giant to you, you know. How powerful I am here ! What mischief and misery I could bring, if I chose, to all these pretty, helpless things ! How odd it is that I should not be able do them any good ! I should like to give them treats, to-day especially. But they are so happy, they don't want me. I could help them out of difficulties, perhaps ; but they don't seem to be in any difficulties. I am very glad that human creatures are not like them in that—only wanting you when they are in trouble, and forgetting you as soon as they are happy. How puzzled my grasshopper looks ! He has not stirred since I put him down ! I am sure he knows that he is sitting under a strange daisy. I don't think he is comfortable, and I shall just carry him back to his old place. I remember it perfectly, because there was such a lovely bit of lilac-blossomed grass just behind him." No sooner said than done ; and when the grasshopper was restored to his home, Eva told him that she was very sorry for having worried him, and she hoped that he would soon recover from the shock ; and then she bounded away in a great hurry, having just remembered that her time was slipping away, and that if she did not make haste she would not get to the waterside at all.

She could not find a way through the last hedge, so she had to get over it. This was rather a difficult operation; but Eva accomplished it by the help of a tree which grew at an angle of the hedgerow. Partly climbing the stem, and partly forcing a passage where the fence was a little looser and thinner than usual, she reached the other side, and got down among the rugged, broken ground, and found a delightful mass of grey stone, with yellow earth lying about it, and velvet moss clinging upon its sides; and oh, such plumes and mazes of glorious fern, and such a vermillion spray of bramble-leaves, all radiant with their autumn splendours! But she did not guess the beauty that was in store for her when she sat down on the other side of that stone of Paradise, just far enough off to command a good view of it. For the stream spread into a marsh just here, and she could look over a wide space of shallow water, with great reeds and grasses standing up out of it, and making solid rainbows of colour—red, violet, and gold—as if a sunset had once come down among them, and had entangled itself, and could not get away again. The sun was not setting, but he was some way on his descent; the sky was flooded with pale yellow light, melting, as it rose to the zenith, into a quiet half-purple, and crossed by soft banks of grey cloud suffused with golden warmth. The spaces of water between these magnificent reeds

and grasses looked almost white, except where the strong reflections pierced them. Eva's eyes filled, and she sighed repeatedly; the first touch of this deep solemnity was oppressive to her. But after a moment she responded to it with every fibre of her being. She sat motionless, and scarcely breathed. She was unable to think; she could only feel; her soul went out of her, and entered into the brightness of the surrounding silence, and was possessed by it. During that silence, all that was good and strong within her grew rapidly. A year's direct schooling would not have done so much to fit her both for the joys and the sorrows of life.

She little guessed that she was watched all the while! When she first began to run in the road which led to her fields, she fancied herself alone. She was quite aware that it would not have been exactly correct to go careering along the public way at racing speed, for the amusement of any chance passers; and before she started off she had looked first up and then down, and satisfied herself that no one was in sight, and that she should be able to reach the stile before any one could come near enough to make it necessary for her to slacken her pace. She had not perceived a young sportsman, who, with gun and game-bag on shoulder, and keeper in attendance, was crossing just at that moment a field on the other side of the road.

The exceeding lightness and swiftness with which Eva ran awakened his keenest admiration ; the fact of her running at all surprised and puzzled him, and filled him with curiosity. He determined to follow the apparition and discover what it was about. He came up to the other side of the hedge, just at the moment when she first sat down and covered her face with her hands, and when she uncovered it again, he, peeping through the quicks, was transfixed and wonderstruck by its loveliness. He watched all her pranks in the meadow, not in the least understanding the feeling which was at the bottom of them, but perfectly well able to appreciate the grace and beauty which were on the surface. He followed her cautiously, still keeping out of sight, till she reached the bank of the river. Once he had to duck ignominiously, and hide himself in a ditch, when she was climbing over the hedge by the help of that tree ; for she was at a point then which commanded a view of the field in which he was lurking, and he was afraid that he should be caught. When at last she sat down by the river side, with her uplifted face turned steadily to the broad tracts of lustrous water, ridged with gorgeous reeds, and sheltered by such a still and tender sky, he settled himself behind the bole of a tree, and stared his fill at her. Presently he soliloquized inaudibly, " Oh ! come, you know, I can't stand this ; I must find out

who she is, and make up to her in some way!" Then he drew a few paces back, and beckoned to his attendant, who was waiting for him at some distance.

"Tom," said he, in a whisper, when the man came up, "you see that young lady sitting over there under the plane tree?"

"Very good, sir," responded Tom.

"You just step up to her and frighten her; be a little rude, do you understand; but don't come it too strong; just scare her a bit about trespassing, or something of that sort. Do it nicely, now."

"Very good, sir," repeated Tom.

"And when I come up, do you just cut away like fun. Do you understand?"

"All right, sir."

"Go and do it then, and look sharp about it."

Carefully concealing himself he watched the execution of his commission with amused and curious eyes. He saw his ambassador come up over the edge of the river bank in front of Eva with a rush and a spring, which startled her even before he spoke. He heard the rough tones, though he could not actually distinguish the words, and he saw and enjoyed the pretty terror with which Eva sprang to her feet (he was not constituted like our friend, Sydney Lennard), and looked about her for help, or for a way of escape. When, however, the keeper moved a step or two

nearer, and put out his hand to touch the shrinking girl, his master indulged in a second brief soliloquy. "Oh! by Jove, you know!" said he to himself, "I told him not to come it too strong, and he *is* coming it too strong." Before he had finished this mental sentence, he had reached the scene of action, and interfered between Eva and her persecutor with no feigned anger. If he had been a master of the middle ages, he would certainly have struck his over-zealous squire to the earth. As it was, he grasped him by the collar, and sent him staggering off with a force that would have ensured him a ducking if they had been a few paces nearer the water. The man gathered himself together, half surly, half laughing, and slunk away, thinking, as he went, that his master's acting was a little more lively than the necessities of the part demanded.

Eva stood trembling, and responded to the courtesies of the stranger with a shy grace which nearly overcame his self-command. He fell in love with her so instantly and so desperately that it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from telling her what had happened to him then and there. And, in fact, there was such an amount of demonstrativeness, *empressement*, and devotion in his manner as would have betrayed his secret in a moment to a person of more experience than Eva. She only felt that she was very much obliged to him, and that his presence

and conversation, instead of reassuring her, put her into what is vulgarly called "a flutter." No better expression could be found to indicate the condition of her mind and manner at that moment than one which owes its origin to the quickness and uncertainty of movement in a bird or a butterfly. And there is an inherent elegance in the metaphor which makes one desire to rescue it from its common associations.

They walked home together. When Eva stopped to buy her grapes, her escort waited for her at the door of the shop, and rejoined her as soon as she came out. Then, of course, it was elicited that she was nursing a sister in a very serious illness, and it was not necessary that a man should be falling in love with her to account for his being touched by all the tender changes in her face and tone when she spoke of Helen. He made himself as acceptable to her as he could by expressions of keen sympathy and anxious interest, and he parted from her very reluctantly and lingeringly, and with many more last words than the most indulgent of chaperons could possibly have sanctioned.

Eva thought little about him as she ran upstairs. Her heart was so full of the approaching festival that there was no room for anything else in it. But there was a lesson before her—a harder lesson than that which she learned in her pleasant dream by the waterside, but one which

was to carry her at least as far forward on her way in learning the great lesson which life teaches, sooner or later, to all.

Helen was tenderly wrapped up in all sorts of shawls and robings as she lay on the bed, and then she was lifted off and conveyed, with the utmost precaution and gentleness, to the arm-chair which had been made ready for her. Beside that arm-chair stood a little table with the grapes, and coffee of ideal perfection (the invalid's favourite restorative), was to arrive as soon as she was ready for it. White and frail she looked, with set lips and wistful eyes, and hands hanging unclosed and languid, as Eva and Mrs. Matthews supported her to her seat. Then Mrs. Matthews went away to fetch the coffee, and Eva stooped over the chair, and having made every conceivable arrangement for the sufferer's comfort, gave her one little closing kiss of triumph and congratulation. In an instant Helen's face was hidden on her breast, and she was pierced and shaken by Helen's violent sobs. And into the very depths of her heart went the terrible words, "Oh ! Eva darling, take no care of me ; I'm so miserable ; I don't want to live—I want to die !"

Before [the] words were spoken, Eva had understood her own mistake, and turned away from it with one keen pang of self-reproach for its childishness and selfishness. "Ah," she

thought, "it was natural enough that I should rejoice ; but how could I fancy that Helen would be pleased, with this deep anguish in her heart ? Each little step in her recovery only makes her more conscious of her grief. What is a hope to me is only a trial to her. How could I—how could I fancy that it would be anything else ? I think I was mad. I see it all now. It will be a long, long time before I must dream of cheering her. The only thing to be done as yet is to grieve with her, to soothe her, and to comfort her as much as possible, and always to remember that however sorry I may be for her, I cannot quite tell what she is feeling. I must watch the symptoms of her grief, and attend to them, just as the doctor watches the symptoms of her illness."

So Eva settled herself to the business of grieving with Helen as heartily as if it had been the most attractive occupation in the world, and left herself no leisure to reflect that it might be in the long run a little depressing for herself. She was eagerly thankful when the storm of weeping was lulled, and she gloried secretly in the disappearance of the sixth grape, and thought that it quite amounted to a meal. She did not dare to allude to baby till a faint whimper from the bed announced that the young hero was conscious that he was neglected, and was inclined to resent it. Then she took the little thing in

her arms and laid it on its mother's knee, and was content to see the quiet tears dropping upon it. This piteous and tender spectacle was Eva's festival. Very soon Helen was weary of sitting up, and Mrs. Matthews was summoned again to help in putting her to bed. Real physical fatigue, the result of unusual exertion and of the strong emotion which had overpowered her, was rather desirable for Helen. Sleep came to her much sooner than usual after her cheek settled upon its pillow ; sleep and the refreshment of a short forgetfulness.

Eva was utterly tired, and went early to her room. She hardly understood what she was feeling, and she did not shed a tear till, as she listlessly undressed herself, a little parcel dropped from her pocket to the floor, and out of it fell the forgotten bit of pink ribbon which had been bought to decorate baby. Then a sense of great irremediable sorrow, that was almost despair, came upon her, and she broke into weeping.

Sleep came to her, too ; and the next morning brought hope and courage to her elastic spirit. But the hope and the courage knew well what was before them, and gathered themselves together for the encounter deliberately, and with no self-deception. They were strengthening an older heart than that which was playing and dreaming by the waterside only yesterday.

After breakfast a bouquet of splendid hot-

house flowers and a basket of fruit arrived for the invalid. A gentleman had brought them, who would be very glad, the maid said, if he could be allowed to speak to Miss Eva just for one moment. Some lucky instinct warned Eva not to admit him to her sitting-room. She went down into the shop, and there met her champion of the previous evening. He was just as eager, deferential, urgent in his manner as he had been when they parted. He was so very anxious to know whether she had suffered from the alarm, and how her sister was, that he had not been able to deny himself the freedom of asking to hear the report from her own lips. He hoped she would forgive him. Eva immediately forgave and thanked him, and added a special expression of gratitude for the flowers and fruit. The bouquet was in her hand, and she looked lovingly at it, and said that she longed to show it to Helen. He gave himself great credit for not falling at her feet when she said so. He himself had so many inquiries and suggestions to make, that there is no knowing how long the interview might have lasted if the sound of Helen's bell had not brought it to an end. Eva was darting away at the first tinkle, but she remembered herself, and came back to say good-bye with a pretty air of grave self-rebuke. She held out her hand to him quite innocently; some fortunate inspiration barely saved him from the fatal blunder of mis-

taking her girlish simplicity for intentional encouragement, and kissing the fair fingers which touched his for the hundredth part of a second. She was gone before he had time to lay the slightest plot for meeting again. But there were plenty of threads ready to his hand, and he had only to decide which of them he should first take up.

The sight of the flowers stirred Helen a little, and she was quite interested in the history of Eva's adventure. It was a real step, thought the anxious nurse. She had almost smiled. Eva made as much of her narration as she could, and recurred to it frequently during the day. It cost her no effort to do so, for she was a good deal excited on the subject herself, and wondered very much what the stranger's name was, and whether she should see him again. She was almost disappointed, when her afternoon walk was finished without meeting him; but her excitement was renewed and increased a hundredfold on the following morning when the maid came to tell her that the same gentleman had called, and that he wanted to know whether he could be admitted to speak to her on very particular business. She had written to Sydney Lennard, as we know, but she had not yet received his monitory answer; and without a moment's hesitation she said that the gentleman was to be shown up-stairs.



CHAPTER XI.

A SURPRISE.

ENBURY was a pleasant village, not more than an hour and a half distant from London. Its principal lane, for you really could not call it a street, wound among gardens of all shapes and sizes, some extending so far that they might be dignified with the name of grounds ; others dwindling down to a couple of square plots of grass with a short gravel walk between them, and a narrow flower-bed bordering their outward edges. Each of these gardens contained an old-fashioned house or cottage which looked as though it might be a very satisfactory sort of a home for a tired man to rest and refresh himself in. A venerable church—grey, quiet, and hospitable, very carefully cleaned and kept, but *not* restored—stood in the centre of the place, with a fine new schoolhouse beside it. They looked as they stood together like a mild elderly widower with a clever, young second wife, who is a little too much for him.

When she chops logic with him, or insists upon his coming out into the world and looking like other people, he sighs and remembers the wife of his youth, who never questioned him in anything, and who believed him to be perfection. But let him only have patience, and make a few unimportant concessions, she will come round to his way of thinking, and he will have the best of it in the long run.

The village contained exactly two shops, but you could not buy anything in either of them. All the commercial necessities of the inhabitants were supplied from London, or from a town which used to be further off than London was now, but which the railroad had brought within a quarter of an hour's excursion. This said railroad, so useful, so disagreeable, and so ugly, had one picturesque accident attendant upon its formation, for which the inhabitants of Fenbury were hardly as grateful as they ought to have been. It had caused the abandonment of the old London road. It was almost incredible how soon after traffic ceased, the green edges of that road began to encroach upon it, and get the better of it—how rugged it grew—how the trees stretched their arms over it, and the walls beside it clothed themselves with unconventional mosses and small, objectionable ferns—how free, and easy, and lazy, and listless, and pleasant it began to look, so that even the field-gates took liberties with it,

and ventured to drop occasionally into unconstrained attitudes under its very eyes, as if they were saying to it, "Never mind, we are not afraid of you now." Nature had got hold of it again, and did not mean to let it go in a hurry; slowly and softly she humoured it back into its forgotten beauty, venturing further and further as she found it respond to her gentle hand, and melt out of its old formalities under her caresses, till at last, when she set her nightingales to sing to it, you felt that she had won the day, and that it could not harbour one lingering wish to escape from her.

A mile out of the village, on this pleasant road, were the great gates of Fenbury Park, through which Sydney, who had left London by an early train, passed at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. He had breakfasted at the village inn, and had there picked up as much information as he could concerning the owner of Fenbury Park. He learned that the Rivers family was of great antiquity, and had the privilege of containing an extinct peerage, to which the landlord alluded rather timidly, as if it were some huge primeval bird which the geologists were putting together bone by bone, which might be resuscitated at any moment, and then—no one knew what it might do. The race had, however, so decided a tendency to dwindle, that there seemed a strong probability that it might become extinct

itself before its peerage was finished, and able to stand alone. The landlord's wife seemed to be a little superstitious on the subject, though she hardly liked to express all she thought. She evidently suspected that either the family or the peerage had to be extinct; that if the one was revived, the other would go, and that Mr. Rivers would be a much wiser man if he let the matter alone in future. The present Mr. Rivers was a far-off cousin of his predecessor, and had never expected to come into the property. Nobody knew how many intermediate heirs had died in order to make room for him.

"He was always very busy about the peerage, sir," said the landlady, "and he had marked out a good deal about it, and was still going on worriting after it in some museum, or mausoleum, or institute—I can't rightly say where. But he stopped just in time, as we may say—just in time; and now he's Mr. Rivers of Fenbury Park.

"What kind of man is he?" asked Sydney; "would he not have liked to be a lord himself?"

"Well, there's no saying," replied the woman, folding her hands; "but you see he mightn't ha' lived to it. It's not safe searching after a wish too far, when it's a wish of that sort."

"Why, you see," added her more matter-of-fact husband; "it's not to say there's any risk in it, but it's waste of labour, and Mr. Rivers he's altogether taken up with learning, and it was

more for the curiosity of the thing he took to it. He don't value the title. He was a deal richer than the old man afore ever he come in to the property. He lived in London and kept open house for travellers, by the which I mean geographical voyagers, not commercials; and he worked as hard as a navvy upon all sorts of things that was of no use to anybody. But he was getting a little up in years, and was not so strong as he used to be, and his London life took a deal out of him. So when he got Fenbury Park he broke up and came to live here at once, in a regular barricade of books and dried beasts. He's not very well liked here. He doesn't visit in the place, you see, except now and again with the clergyman; he has his own comrades and sympathizers down from London, and keeps himself to hisself, and hasn't dined the neighbourhood once since he took possession. That's not going the way to be popular. But he gives a deal o' money in the way of charity, and maintains a lot o' vagabonds that would be no loss if they wasn't maintained, and does uncommon handsome by all his tenants if they'll only keep out of his sight from year's end to year's end. That's the most he asks of them or of any of us."

"Has he a son?" asked Sydney.

"Lord bless you, sir, he was never married," said the landlady. "It wasn't likely for the sort of gentleman that he is. They do say he was

duped some way in his youth, and took it to heart ever afterwards like a novel."

"Pshaw!" interposed her husband with a superior smile, "he doesn't look much like *that* anyhow. A man must be a little softer than he is, surely, to fret long after a woman."

"Oh, but he fretted because he was took in," explained the landlady; "it hurted his pride, don't you see, and that's what set him to drying beasts and such like. Soft! No; Mr. Rivers is not soft."

"An obstinate man?" asked Sydney, suggestively. And they answered him by the most expressive silence. After a little pause the landlord said,

"Nobody ever tried to move him that wasn't the worse for it. He's that steady you might make a lighthouse of him."

"The place is a show-place, I suppose," said Sydney, rising from his breakfast. "I've heard a good deal of the pictures. I'm going out to have a look at them."

"Mr. Rivers found the place a show-place," replied the landlord, "and he's left it so; according to his politics he's a downright Radical, and so he durstn't interfere with public enjoyment, but according to his heart he's a emperor, if ever emperor was, and so it worrits his life out. But he's made a regulation that nobody's to be let in to see the place after twelve o'clock at noon,

and he never stirs out of his private study till that hour's past, and in that way he continues to keep hisself clear of seeing his fellow-creatures making theirselves comfortable."

Sydney laughed. "Well," said he, "you certainly don't love your great man, Mr. Stokes. I wonder now if I were to have a little chat with him about Fenbury, what he would tell me of you?"

"He couldn't say nothin' against me," returned Stokes, doggedly.

"No, man, nor he wouldn't say nothin' for you," added his wife. "Nor *do* nothin', neither. Fifty years come and gone, the tenants of Fenbury Park was always used to have their yearly dinner at this here "White Horse," and the house provided all things, and all parties was satisfied. Never heered a word of reproach from nobody, cep'n it was old Mr. Francis of Lea Farm, who always kept his bed for three days after the dinner (nigh on a week the last time or two, since he got so aged), and used to say he thought it was something in the quality of the liquor that confounded him. But bless you, we and all the place know'd better, for we know'd it was the quantity. But now no more dinners at the "White Horse!" The dinner is in the park, and the tenants get orders to enjoy theirselves with sports and games like a pack o' children, instead of sitting steady to their—to their *talk*—

like men. And Mr. Rivers stood up among 'em the first time (the only time he's shown his face among 'em, and no loss to *them*), and actilly said—for I heered him with my own ears—that he meant to dishearten the "White Horse" if he could. He's a teetotaller."

"Well, well, wife," said the more cautious Stokes, a little annoyed that the cause of his objections to Mr. Rivers should be so plainly revealed; "every man has a right to his principles."

"And that's what I'll never believe!" retorted she, indignantly. "And I couldn't have thought it of you, Stokes, to theorize before a gentleman like that! It's only them whose principles is right principles as have any right to have principles at all."

Sydney had one more question to ask after he had paid his reckoning and wished good-day to the indignant Mrs. Stokes. He asked it of the landlord, who had followed him to the door, to point out the road to Fenbury Park.

"Who is the heir of this property?" said he. "You say there's no son; who comes next to Mr. Rivers?"

"Well," answered Stokes, "Mr. Rivers may leave it where he likes, if he makes a will. The heir-at-law is as fine a young fellow as ever you see—he's somewhere in foreign parts now, and it's said he's not on the best of terms with his

uncle. He's stood in his own light, they say, by having his objections to scientific pursuits, and showin' 'em. Everybody in Fenbury wishes him well. Captain Adrian Rivers is his name. Then there's his younger brother, who's altogether another sort—takes to his books, and is extravagantly sober for a young man. He doesn't know a horse from a camel-leopard, and it's my belief that if he had to mount one in the street he'd get up from behind. That's a sort of ignorance that recommends him uncommon to his uncle. And they do say that Captain Adrian's likely to be cut out, but I can't tell you the truth of it one way or another. Good morning to you, sir. You can't miss your road now."

Sydney walked thoughtfully away. He was not at any time an upholder of the common theory that if you want to learn a man's real character, you must hear what is said of him by his inferiors. Truth is so dear to the heart of man, and so difficult of attainment, that when we are disappointed in our search after it among ourselves, we are apt to relegate it to some class and region with which we are not familiar, for no other reason than because we are not familiar with them. A man's dependents and inferiors will probably give you a very good notion of his character in his relations with themselves, but as to all the rest of it, they are fully as fond of gossip and as prone to misunderstanding as

their betters, the main difference being that gossip and misunderstanding amongst them, present the melodramatic colours and proportions, with which they are familiar in their popular literature, and which their taste chiefly affects. The gentleman who dined with Mr. Jones last Tuesday will tell you, in a moment of confidence, that people do say Jones worked very hard for his legacy ; he kept about the old man to the last, and wouldn't let anybody else go near him. But the draper, and the innkeeper, and the postmaster strongly suspect that Mr. Jones guided the old man's hand to sign the desired codicil, when the old man's head was far too weak to guide it for himself, and that he hurried some helpless orphans out of the house lest they should interfere with his proceedings. And the butcher's boy has no manner of doubt that when Jones had finished the operation, he put a wet cloth over the old man's face. The lower you go in the social scale, the higher is the pitch of the slander. There is no surer test of a vulgar and uneducated mind than the amount and blackness of the evil which it is eager to believe of its neighbours.

Sydney was sufficiently familiar with reflections such as these to suspend his judgment upon Mr. Rivers's character even before Stokes and his wife had supplied the key to their dislike. The question which he proposed to himself, as

he sauntered up the road to the park-gates was, "How much truth is there at the bottom of all this, and what is the nature of the particular bit of truth which these falsehoods have disguised?" And this being a question which he could not answer, he strayed away into a useless maze of conjectures. He settled within himself that Captain Adrian Rivers, whose portrait he had in his pocket, was so unmitigated a scamp, in spite of his knowledge of horseflesh, that it was a very doubtful matter whether Helen would derive any sort of benefit from being restored to him. At any rate he was sure that no harm could come of exposing him to his uncle; no harm, that is, which the nephew did not abundantly deserve. Let Captain Adrian's younger brother be who and what he might, he was probably a fitter master for Fenbury Park than his senior. From these considerations he passed to very unsatisfactory musings about Helen's position, past, present, and future, and the transition from Helen to Eva was easy and pleasant. Eva's face was before him, almost childish in its lines and tints, yet so full of force in its expression, so prophetic, so eloquent, of a nature that could not take life easily—all the capacities large, all the sensibilities quick, all the impulses strong; much guiding, governing, and protecting was needed, he thought, for this human being, and richly would she repay them. He smiled to himself as he

remembered her rebellions and her submissions, as he compared his reception with his farewell. He thought that he should rather like to trust Captain Adrian Rivers to her tender mercies. Then he began to think indignantly and anxiously about the gentleman with the fruit, to wonder whether by this time he had received his *congé*, to settle with himself that there were many reasons which rendered it desirable for him to take his promised run down to Northborough as soon as possible. By the time that he had reached this point, he was standing before the façade of Fenbury House.

A great old leisurely mansion, Elizabethan of course, and not much disfigured by recent attempts at decoration. The mullioned windows had been filled with plate glass, which admitted a sufficiency of light without modernizing the form in which it was admitted. The wide terrace was probably as gay with borders and bouquets of flowers in Queen Bess's time as it was now—only the flowers were a little different, and the background of ilex, beech, and maple was probably less stately and less luxuriant. The long stretch of artificial water over which the foliage leaned was just the same, and so was the bridge which spanned it, and the two little tufted islands which rose out of it, and which counterfeited nature a good deal better now than they did in those old times, when, on the occasion of a cele-

brated visit from the maiden queen, it is recorded that they were sprinkled all over with artificial savages in inconvenient attitudes who were supposed to have assembled there in order to defend their hearths and homes from the inroads of civilization. Nothing more savage than a swan was to be found upon these islands now, and any boat's crew might land and pic-nic upon them, secure from molestation. Sydney stood a minute or two upon the terrace, and took in the general aspect of the scene, before he mounted the marble platform and rang the great door-bell.

He asked in the first instance to see the picture gallery, and was at once admitted. On his way there he inquired whether Mr. Rivers was at home, and whether he could see him on business, either then or later in the day. The housekeeper looked doubtful.

"Mr. Rivers is not very well at present, sir," said she, "I can't say whether he will be able to see you, but you can see his secretary."

"My business is with Mr. Rivers himself," replied Sydney.

"I couldn't take upon myself to disturb Mr. Rivers till after twelve o'clock, sir," answered the woman; "but if you can wait so long, I will take him your card then, and ascertain whether he is able to receive you."

Sydney handed her his card, and having satisfied his curiosity about the pictures, and seen

quite enough of the Adrian Rivers type among the family portraits to confirm the evidence of the photograph, he went out upon the terrace again to while away the time till twelve o'clock. He was loitering along ; looking now at his watch, now at the flower-beds, and again at the buttressed and windowed wall under which he was passing, when he was suddenly brought to a full stop by a sight so unexpected and so bewildering, that he rubbed his eyes and looked again, and really doubted whether he was quite in his senses. Behind one of these breadths of plate glass, neatly framed in the cased stonework, was a face which he knew as well as his own. It had a tired, troubled, bewildered, and decidedly cross expression, but still there was no mistaking Robert's face. He was bending forward over some papers, and a pen was in his hand, he seemed to be quite engrossed by his occupation, and to dislike it particularly. He did not once look up, and was evidently quite unconscious that he was undergoing inspection. While Sydney stood staring at him like a man in a dream, he gave a conspicuous yawn and sigh, accompanied by a little provoked movement with the pen, as though he was saying, "Confound it !" There could be no manner of doubt that this was Robert. Sydney gave a run and a jump, mounted a string-course which ran round the building at a height of some four or five feet above the level

of the terrace, leaned his arms upon the sill of the window, and pressed his face against the glass. He looked into a superb library, fitted with every possible convenience and appliance for study, and lighted by four great oriel windows, each of which contained a complete writing apparatus, and a leathern arm-chair in its recess. No one was in the room except Robert, and he occupied, in solitary state, the window below which Sydney was standing, and seemed to be very busy and very uncomfortable. The sudden interposition of Sydney's head and shoulders between him and his light startled him; he rose to his feet. It is impossible to describe the astonishment with which he recognized Sydney. He stood dumb and transfixed; he actually turned pale. After a moment of blank, incredulous wonder, and another moment of manifest embarrassment and discomfiture, he burst into a hearty fit of irrepressible laughter. In scarcely a moment more he was by Sydney's side on the terrace.



CHAPTER XII.

ROBERT'S MASTER.

TEN minutes' explanation between the brothers sufficed not exactly to satisfy Sydney, but to acquaint him with Robert's position. Robert gave but a blundering account of himself, nevertheless he made it more intelligible than he wished, and the heart-sinking with which Sydney heard him, and filled up the gaps in his narrative, was unmixed with surprise or doubt. It was rather a dejected sort of recognition of something which was quite expected though not welcomed—"here it is again!" said with a shake of the head. Robert felt the deep distrust implied by his brother's silence. It pained him, it irritated him, he looked upon it as a wrong. He would rather by far have encountered a torrent of reproaches and taken his chance of finding some half-dozen amongst them unjust enough to entitle him to repel them with indignation. As it was, he had nothing to say. He tried to make out a

good case of grievances at Liverpool, but failed signally. He did not venture to tell Sydney that no gentleman could have remained in his position; but he muttered a good deal about overbearing conduct, and things he couldn't stand, and a great fuss about nothing, etc. He dwelt much upon the fact that there was a certain nephew of the firm in whose way he stood, and who was on all occasions favoured at his expense.

"I found I could never expect justice," said he, "and a man can't stay where he doesn't meet with justice."

"It's very well if he can stay where he *does* meet with it," answered Sydney, with a grave, slight smile. It was the only word approaching to a sarcasm which he uttered.

"You're hard upon me, Sydney. I can tell you I don't need taking down. I'm as low as a fellow can well be. Of course nobody can feel this as much as I do, or suffer as much from it. Let the fault be where it may, and I don't set up for being faultless any more than others, the consequences have fallen upon me, and I tell you plainly, they're about as much as I can manage to bear."

"They don't fall upon *you* only," began Sydney.

"Oh! if you're thinking about yourself," interrupted Robert, bitterly; "set your mind at ease. I won't ask *you* for help."

"I was thinking of my mother," said Sydney.

“Well,” cried Robert, half blustering, half sobbing, for his tears were almost as ready as a woman’s, “do you suppose I don’t think about her? It’s cruel to put it in that light when I can’t help myself. If *you* were in trouble the last thing *I* should think of would be to taunt *you* with my mother’s distress. Nobody on earth loves my mother half so well as I do. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for her. Why, I’d break stones on the road to keep her from a moment’s annoyance.”

Sydney felt hard and unsympathetic, and reproached himself for so feeling. He had no doubt at all as to the genuineness of Robert’s emotion, and, unhappily, just as little doubt as to its fruitlessness. The kind of love which is always offering to make impossible sacrifices and declining to do its daily work, is not so uncommon as to be unintelligible. But Sydney was, as we have said before, philosophical in his behaviour under irremediable ills, and perhaps a little too much inclined to take for granted that the ills which he encountered personally were irremediable, and that they called not for opposition but for philosophy. Whatever were the defects which belonged to such a temperament it had at least the advantage of making him particularly pleasant and easy to live with. He was not generally supposed to be an imaginative man, but there was one form of imaginative power

which he possessed in the highest degree—the power of putting himself, rapidly and instinctively, into the position of another, and of so realizing the feelings of that other as to modify his own course of acting and judging without any deliberate or conscious purpose on his part. He felt now that Robert was unhappy, and that he believed himself to be one of the best and most unfortunate sons in the world, and that to him, so believing and so feeling, censure even in the mildest form must appear very hard and offensive, and want of sympathy must appear very cold and heartless. So entirely did Sydney enter into and comprehend this state of feeling, and so thoroughly did he accept it as a state which could not be changed, that instead of saying to himself, “Of course I am angry, and I have a right to be,” he was saying, “Of course *he* is angry, and it is only natural that he should be.” So he answered, soothingly—

“Come, come, Bertie, we won’t quarrel. I assure you I feel for you very much. Let us rather consider how we can manage matters so as to spare my mother as much as possible.”

“That’s what I *have* considered, and that’s why I’m here,” replied Robert, readily. “You see there won’t be anything to hurt my mother if she never hears that I’m out of one berth till I’m in another quite as good.”

"And you think this will do? You think you'll be able to stay?" asked Sydney, anxiously, and framing the question so as to imply as little insult as possible to his brother's stability.

"Well," answered Robert, with a half groan, "I must make up my mind to it. I'll stay if it's possible, you may be sure of that. I find I can do all the old gentleman wants of me, and I should get along very well if I were only left to myself."

Sydney felt some doubts upon this point, but he did not express them.

"You see," continued Robert, warming to his subject, "he's such a crotchety, inconsistent sort of old chap, one doesn't know where to have him. He's always testing me. I give you my word of honour, Syd, he has brought me into that state of insecurity that I hardly dare put one foot before another. Now to give you an example. I'm to work alone for the first hours of the day, doing what he has chalked out for me the night before, and at twelve o'clock he comes into the library to see what I'm about. Well, the first morning I found my programme—certain calculations that I was to make; did 'em all; then a lot of extracts—got thro' 'em in no time; then I was to verify two or three things for him—all in the way of zoology and ethnological investigations, if you know what that means. Nobody would believe (with a deep sigh) how much I know about ethnology since I came here. Well, I got to the

bottom of the list, and there was written like a sort of note at the end, 'The Neanderthal skull is an interesting subject, and if you care to acquaint yourself with it, and with the cognate inquiry touching the bone caves, you will find all you want in such and such places'—no end of authors' names. Bless your heart, thought I, *I* don't want to know anything about the Neanderthal skull—much obliged to you all the same. So I settled myself in the easy-chair as comfortably as possible, and began to read a novel with which I had had the forethought to provide myself, till twelve o'clock. Now, will you believe it? all this was a trap! At a quarter before twelve (and it was the most unfair thing in the world coming before his time in that way!) at a quarter before twelve in popped the old rascal before I knew where I was, to find out whether I was writing a memoir upon the Neanderthal skull! Catch me writing memoirs of skulls; I wish you could see the picture of it—it's the most frightful object; I wouldn't write a memoir of the scoundrel to save my life. There I was, however, regularly floored. He wanted to discover, he said, whether I was capable of taking an intelligent interest in his pursuits. Wasn't it *too* bad?"

Sydney admitted that it was hard, and Robert being in full flow went on with scarcely a pause.

"Then if I leave anything about, if it's only for ten minutes, he hides it; and then comes and

asks me for it quite gravely. It's a perfect monomania. Of course I look like a fool. I shouldn't mind if he did it for the fun of the thing, but he's as grave as one of the old Puritans. And it's quite impossible to be on one's guard against him, for if he can't catch you on one tack he tries another. Now there was yesterday, I found another of those confounded little notes at the end of the programme. 'In a few days we shall begin indexing the manuscripts.' Oh, thought I, that's what you're about, is it? I shall be too many for you this time. So I set to work and indexed like fun. Well, you'll hardly believe me, I was all wrong again! He had put that, he said, because he wanted to see whether I had judgment enough to consider that it was useless to begin indexing without special instructions from him. And he also wanted to see (two traps at once, you know) whether I should remember to ask him about it. You know it's more than any fellow can stand. I shouldn't wonder," added Robert, with a sudden change of voice, "if he were hiding among those bushes at this very moment. It's just like him. One is never safe from him. I declare (standing on tiptoe and stretching his neck to look) I declare I thought I saw something moving. Oh! shouldn't I like just to try one shot into the cover on the chance! We'd better go in, Sydney, I'll introduce you to him by and by; we'd better go in at once that he may be sure to find me at work."

They went into the library, and Robert sat down to his writing-table and began to explain his morning's task. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of astonishment, "Why, just look here!" he cried, "I'll be hanged if this isn't his own private and particular penknife left upon this table. Oh, this is too tempting! I declare I'll hide it, and ask him for it with an innocent face as soon as ever he comes in. Stop, though; goodness only knows whether it doesn't mean something; yes, yes, it's a trap, you may rely upon it," shaking his head wisely; "it's nothing but a trap. I won't touch it. I dare say, now," he continued, in voice of deep dejection, "it was left here in order that he may find whether I have noticed where it is generally kept, and if I were to do the correct thing, I should put it in its proper place before he comes in. But I wish I may be garotted if I know where it's generally kept, if it isn't in his own pocket, and I can't put it there. *Would* you mind taking it, Syd, and offering to mend his pen with it by and by, just for the fun of the thing?"

Sydney declined, and before a quarter of an hour was over, he was deep in Robert's work, while Robert was lounging back and looking at him. It came to pass quite naturally. There was first a short discussion between the brothers upon the subject which Robert had in hand; then Sydney looked out two or three of the passages

which were to be extracted, and read them aloud, and grew a little warm in commenting upon them, as there was a question of comparative anatomy involved, which he understood, and in which he was interested. Illustrations and authorities occurred to him in support of his own view; and having tried to indoctrinate Robert with it and failed, the matter ended by his taking the pen into his own hand and writing as if for his life.

“How uncommonly like the Princess Graciosa I do feel, to be sure!” said Robert, in a tone of the greatest satisfaction, when this had gone on for about half-an-hour.

“You don’t look like her,” growled Sydney, over his manuscript. “There, just get that volume of Carpenter, will you, and look for the passage I want. You may as well make yourself of a little use.”

“I think I agree with you there,” said a quiet voice.

Sydney looked up and saw Mr. Rivers, who had entered the room unperceived, and was standing behind Robert’s chair. He was a tall, thin, elderly man, with rather an ungainly stoop, and with restless excitable eyes, that seemed to be always challenging you to give a satisfactory account of yourself. His face had not the traditional pallor of the student. In fact, if his health had not been more than ordinarily robust,

it could not have endured the trials to which he habitually put it. Long fasts, hurried but hearty meals at all sorts of irregular hours, very early rising, very hard work, sometimes a month with no greater amount of air and exercise than could be obtained by a ten minutes' rush about the garden while breakfast or tea was in waiting, then all on a sudden a walk of fifteen miles—these were vicissitudes which few men could have endured with impunity ; and iron as he was, they had told upon him. He looked older than his years, and an occasional sharp attack of illness warned him that it would be wise to adopt a milder and more regular style of living before he had done himself irreparable injury.

Robert introduced his brother a little sheepishly, and Sydney apologized with a laugh for the liberty he had taken.

“The subject is rather in my line,” said he, “and it ran away with me, and I was doing my brother’s work for love.”

“I like enthusiasm,” said Mr. Rivers, decidedly. “What are you ?”

“I’m a doctor,” said Sydney, “a Londoner, just at the end of my ten months’ stretch of work, and beginning to think about a holiday. You can fancy what a Garden of Eden this place looks to me.”

“No I can’t,” replied Mr. Rivers ; “I never saw the Garden of Eden, and I think there’s

nothing in life so disagreeable as a holiday, unless," he added, relaxing into a grim smile, and looking down upon Sydney's manuscript, "it is such a holiday as you seem to take—merely another sort of work."

"I'm afraid I mustn't claim that character on the strength of having a hobby," said Sydney, lightly; "I am as fond of a little bit of ~~hearty~~ idleness as any man."

"You use words without meaning," replied Mr. Rivers. "What is ~~hearty~~ idleness?"

Mr. Rivers's manner was peculiar. He had rather a loud voice, and a deliberate sustained mode of enunciating his words as though he had learned them by heart and were reciting them. This deliberation took something from the abruptness of his sharp questions and short contradictions, but it did not render them less impressive. Rather it gave you the idea that having thoroughly considered the ~~matter~~ in hand, and the part which you had taken about it, he had come to the conclusion that it would be right to box your ears, and he was going to do it. Now a petulant box on the ear is easier to bear than a judicial one; it hurts the pride less, and it does not make a retort impossible. Mr. Rivers would have been very much surprised had he encountered a retort in any shape. He was not used to such things. He was accustomed to be treated with deference, which he owed partly to

his age, partly to his wealth, partly to his well-earned reputation for learning, but chiefly to his rudeness. For he was habitually as rude as a gentleman can be without altogether ceasing to be a gentleman; and indeed, if it had not been that his person was well *soigné*, his accent faultless, his birth unimpeachable, and his means large, there can be little doubt that, long before this, society would have questioned his claim to be considered a gentleman. But society will bear a great deal from a man in his position. It allowed Mr. Rivers to lay down the law to it, whenever they came in contact, with wonderful meekness, and only revenged itself by calling him excessively dictatorial behind his back. So he went about putting people down whether they deserved it or not, with an impunity which was very bad for him, and which was likely to render him in the end the most formidable and rampant old person that ever was seen.

Sydney Lennard was not a man to be put down by anybody. Always thoroughly himself, and seldom thinking about himself at all; quiet, genial, unsuspicuous; remarkably slow to imagine that any offence was intended against him, and with a habit of being amused rather than irritated by the peculiarities of his fellow-creatures, even when they were inconvenient to him, he was the very man to encounter Mr. Rivers without hurting or being hurt. One little practice which he

unconsciously adopted during their first interview, and persevered in afterwards, stood him in good stead. He never looked upon those short stern questions as rebukes, he looked upon them as questions, and he answered them as well and as quickly as he could. Mr. Rivers, who was accustomed to deliver his inquiries in a tone of defiance, and to consider the silence which generally followed them as a proof of his ascendancy, and of the discomfiture of his interlocutor, did not quite know what to make of it at first. But in time he decidedly liked it.

So now when he emitted his question with an indignant snort, "What is *hearty* idleness?" he was a good deal surprised at receiving an immediate answer—

"It's just the play that keeps Jack from being a dull boy," said Sydney.

"But why *hearty*?" asked Mr. Rivers, with increasing violence.

"Because your heart need not be idle while your head and hands are resting."

"Humph!" said Mr. Rivers. We are not sure that we spell the sound correctly. It may be described as a sort of puzzled snarl. After a short pause, during which he was looking at Sydney's manuscript with a face continually brightening, he broke out with the utmost vivacity.

"Ah! that's a new thought. Never occurred

to me. I'm uncommonly obliged to you for this. To be sure, to be sure ! Overlooked. Must be tested at once. Can't leave it a minute. Very well put indeed. But I can answer it" (his voice was gradually rising to a roar) "I can answer it ! I hope you've got plenty of time to spare. Make your holiday here. You shall see what I can show you." He was tearing at book-shelves and cabinets while he spoke, and covering the table with charts, papers, and books. "We must go through this together, Mr. Lennard. Manuscripts 504, 505, and 506, 723 and 957, immediately. And the microscope. And the sixth drawer in the seventeenth compartment. And *your* fair copy of *my* rough chart on the relations of vertebræ and spinal marrows throughout the class, which was finished this morning. At once if you please."

Robert gave Sydney a comical look, and began bustling about with a great show of alacrity. Mr. Rivers, meanwhile drawing his own chair close to the table, and setting one for Sydney beside him, began spreading out his papers and haranguing upon them with the utmost conceivable vehemence, and to the real instruction and delight of his listener. He looked up from time to time, and acknowledged with a nod, or corrected with a growl, the contribution which Robert brought to the heap on the table. When the third manuscript which he had de-

manded was brought, and when it proved to be the wrong one, as its two predecessors had proved before it, he said, more calmly than might have been expected—

“I speak very loudly and plainly, and you ought to attend to what I say, and not to require to have it repeated. I shall teach you this lesson in time. 506, 723, 957. There; another time I shall not repeat the numbers, but I shall leave you to go on searching among the manuscripts till you remember. Where is the chart?”

Robert made no answer, but fidgeted about the room in a hopeless manner.

“Where is the chart?” reiterated Mr. Rivers, speaking, as he asserted that he did, *very* loudly and plainly.

“I will get it in a moment. Just at this instant I have not exactly been able to lay my hand upon it,” began Robert, with the manner of a scolded schoolboy.

“Here it is—not finished!” returned Mr. Rivers, with cold-blooded triumph, producing the paper in question from his own pocket. “I saw it as soon as I came into the room.”

“I am really very sorry,” said Robert; “my brother’s unexpected arrival——”

“As your brother did part of your work, I think you might have done the rest,” observed Mr. Rivers. He added, in a tone of surprising good-nature, “But what you have done is per-

fectly correct, and deliciously neat. So now perhaps you will be good enough to finish it while we go on with our business."

Robert withdrew to his own window and table, and set to work with the air of a reprieved criminal who is not quite sure whether the execution of his sentence might not have been preferable to the reprieve—death, to hard labour for life.

"Your brother wants training," said Mr. Rivers to Sydney; "but I am willing to take a great deal of trouble with him. He happens to suit me on one or two points. I mean to train him. I am a very patient man. Ha! you have got hold of the very passage! You have an eye; you have an eye! Now, read that carefully; don't miss a word, and you will see how it tells upon your argument. When you are master of that point we'll discuss it again."

They went on in what Robert afterwards described as a miraculous and incredible manner for at least an hour. He could scarcely bring himself to believe in the genuineness of Sydney's animation over the knotty points of the discussion. Twice Mr. Rivers quarrelled with him, and became increasingly genial after each quarrel. Robert watched what he called the successful treatment of the patient with certain vague hopes that he might be able to imitate it at some future opportunity. Presently Mr. Rivers said, with his usual suddenness—

"You can spend the day, I hope. You can dine. Can you sleep?"

"I'm afraid not, thank you," replied Sydney. "I must be at home by six o'clock."

Mr. Rivers looked at his watch, and rang the bell with spirit.

"We dine at two," said he, when the stately and servile butler answered the summons.

The man withdrew, but reappeared in a few minnutes.

"If you please, sir," said he, hesitatingly, "Mrs. Jewitt requests me to say that the dinner was ordered at eight, and to ask——"

"The same dinner that was ordered at eight is to be ready at two, tell Mrs. Jewitt."

Mr. Rivers uttered the decree with great force, and it was received with profound submission; and the whole of the little transaction was unquestionably a relief and a comfort to him, and a provocation to Mrs. Jewitt, who had often said that nobody could be expected to put up with master if he was a poor man. But Mr. Rivers got a very different dinner at two o'clock from that which he would have had at eight; and he knew it in his heart, so that in fact Mrs. Jewitt carried off the victory after all.

"I had some business with you unconnected with these scientific matters," said Sydney, thinking this a good opportunity at which to introduce his subject. "When will it suit you to allow me a few minutes' conversation?"

"Unconnected with scientific matters!—about your brother, then?" said Mr. Rivers.

"No; not about my brother. A matter which I would rather not mention till I can have time to explain it."

"Can you put it off?" asked Mr. Rivers.

"Why, not very well."

"Not very well? But can you manage to put it off, well or ill? If you can, *do*, and come some other day about it."

"If I put it off, it will only be under compulsion," replied Sydney. "The thing is urgent, and I am anxious."

"Talk about it at dinner, then," cried Mr. Rivers. "And now for this remarkable case of muscular action after the removal of the cerebrum and cerebellum. We have come well up to the point. You see Lewis's theory; you are familiar with Bell, and the older men. I want to hear what you have to say. I'll give you my own theory afterwards; I am fully prepared. Have you noticed *the* point? Look carefully. Do you perceive the consideration which they have overlooked—all of them? You technical and professional men are the best critics in the world, and we want you for facts—we can't do without you for facts; but you are sometimes curiously behind-hand in reasoning."



CHAPTER XIII.

A FIEST ATTEMPT.

CHEN the dessert was on the table, Sydney began with an anxious heart, “I have to speak to you on a very delicate subject; and you may perhaps think that I take an unjustifiable liberty in touching it at all. But I hope you won’t refuse to listen to me.”

Mr. Rivers drew up and answered instantly, “If you think it a liberty, I may not improbably think it something worse. You had better let it alone.”

It was not possible for a man to change his manner more completely in a moment. Just before he had been in the full flow of harangue and disquisition, implying at every sentence an admiration of Sydney’s powers and an enjoyment of his conversation that almost amounted to homage. But Sydney had got no further in his preface than the word “delicate,” when his listener was transformed into a foe. A hard,

cold, distrustful expression came into his eyes, and he looked about as unpromising a subject for a pathetic appeal as could well be found. In fact, he was a man who considered that the regulation of his intercourse with others belonged exclusively to himself, and that it was their business to confine themselves strictly to the channels which he opened, and not to open any others.

Sydney paused a moment, and admitted to himself that he had made a false move. He had not calculated upon such a hostile attitude at the outset. It would have been better to ask simply for Captain Adrian Rivers's present address, before entering upon the reasons for which he wanted it. Perhaps it was not yet too late.

"Well," said he, "I will consider the matter. Meantime, may I ask you for the present address of your nephew, Captain Adrian Rivers?"

"For what reason?"

"For the plain reason that I wish to write to him."

"All letters addressed to Captain Adrian Rivers are forwarded through me," said the uncle, deliberately.

"May I understand that all such letters *are* forwarded, without exception? It would relieve me from a great difficulty."

"I have nothing to do with your difficulties

or your understanding," replied Mr. Rivers, roughly.

"Will you forward a letter from me?" asked Sydney.

"I never make pledges about anything," said Mr. Rivers; "you can leave or send a letter here if you please. That is all I have to say on the subject; and now we'll change it." He rose as he spoke. "Mr. Lennard," added he, addressing Robert, "you will probably like to have a stroll about the grounds with your brother, so I release you for the afternoon. You have an hour before the up-train starts."

"Oh!" cried Sydney, "I'm sorry to say this won't do. I have enjoyed this morning heartily; I am really grateful to you for the reception you have given me, and the privileges you have allowed me. I was venturing to look forward to a repetition of such pleasures in future, and now I must put an end to it all! I must finish it all up by affronting you. I am so sorry."

Mr. Rivers looked as if he did not quite know what to make of this whimsical expression of penitence for an offence not yet committed, and Sydney took advantage of the momentary hesitation, and plunged into his subject at once.

"I have been attending Mrs. Adrian Rivers, your nephew's wife, as a medical man," said he, "and I want to communicate with her husband."

"I'll pay your bill," interrupted Mr. Rivers, coarsely.

"You'll wait till I present it, if you please," answered Sydney, with admirable temper. "This poor girl—for she is but eighteen—Mrs. Adrian Rivers, has been at the point of death. She is breaking her heart after her husband, and if it is impossible for him to come to her and to his child—a point on which I cannot of course pretend to form an opinion—he may at least write to her and relieve the anxiety which is killing her—that's not a mere phrase. I really shouldn't be surprised if it were to kill her."

"Stop a moment," exclaimed Mr. Rivers, "you've not half stated your case. Where did this marriage take place? who gave the bride away? what lawyer drew the settlement? why, where, and when, did the husband and wife separate? What view does the lady's family take of the transaction? You ought to have an answer ready for every one of these questions before you presume to introduce the subject to me."

"I'm not able to answer one of them," said Sydney, quietly.

"No!" shouted Mr. Rivers; "you're out of your depth! You're out of your place! Physic your patients, cure them or kill them, just as you like; nobody has any right to interfere with you there. But have the goodness to let their private affairs

alone, at least until you know a little more about the symptoms. As for me, I'm not your patient, either physically or mentally, and I decline having anything more to do with the matter."

"Think better of it," entreated Sydney; "I'm speaking from personal knowledge, but I have not the slightest interest in the question, apart from its real merits, as I need not tell you. I come fresh from the poor girl's bedside. I don't think there's a more desolate, helpless creature on earth than she is; and such a child too. Will you see her and judge for yourself?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Rivers. "You're a young man, and it's easy to impose upon you. Very pretty girls would find it an easy matter to persuade you that they are desolate and helpless. I'll just tell you one thing, to show you how completely you are in the dark. My nephew, Captain Adrian Rivers, was never married."

"I was afraid of that," said Sydney, quickly. "That is the saddest possibility to which I have looked."

"Now, mark me," said Mr. Rivers, "I'm not going to listen to any false sentiment on the subject. I know the whole transaction from first to last. If Captain Adrian Rivers has behaved like a scamp, that's his affair, not yours. I have undertaken to provide for the woman, and I shall do it, but the connection is broken off, now and for ever, and I shall not allow any step to be

taken which may possibly lead to its renewal. If you like to take charge of a remittance for your *protégée*, you can. If not, you can leave it. It's all the same to me, only let me hear no more about it."

"No," said Sydney, gravely; "I will take charge of no remittance. I wish—I wish I could persuade you to deliver it in person, to see and judge for yourself."

Mr. Rivers smiled. "If I am such a brute as you think me," observed he, "judging for myself would probably make matters worse."

Sydney answered the smile. "I am so far from thinking you a brute," said he, "that I am confident that one sight of the facts would make you as full of pity as I am. Nay, more, I believe that a sight of the facts would make you determine that whatever be the legal formalities which were omitted, no advantage should be taken of the omission, but that this unhappy young mother should be made the wife, which she entirely believes herself to be."

"So—so—so!" said Mr. Rivers, provokingly, "pay me the compliment of believing that I have not judged without being fully acquainted with the facts. And now, good morning to you." He made a haughty little bow, and walked out of the room.

"Well, Syd," cried Robert, as soon as the door was shut, "a pretty sort of elder brother

you are, to go bullying my master before my face in this manner! I'm safe to lose my situation, you know. I've been literally quaking with terror the whole time. Whenever you insulted him I expected him to hit me, and then, you know, I must have hit him again, and there would have been a shindy."

"I hope to heaven," said Sydney, "that I've done you no mischief, Bertie. I assure you I thought of it, but I couldn't help myself."

"And now tell us all about it," said Robert, "for I'm hungry with curiosity."

Sydney gave him a sketch of the facts, to which he listened with the keenest interest, and constituted himself Helen's champion without a moment's delay.

"And one comfort is," said he, as a climax, "if I lose my employment on *this* account, nobody can say that it's my fault."

Sydney spent the rest of his time at Fenbury in counselling caution. He returned to London very much out of spirits. Circumstances had favoured him more than he could have dared to hope, but the event proved how much stronger characters are than circumstances.

Personality is, after all, the most powerful element in the world's history; and the only reason why it does not appear to be such in the narrative, is that we know so little about it, that if we attempt to assign to it its due weight in

any given case, we are pretty sure to make mistakes. But across nearly all theories of the future, as it ought to be, or as it must be, lies the insuperable bar of some one human being who won't do what is expected of him. Sydney had been very lucky in piecing together his evidence; he had found out nearly all that he wanted to know with great rapidity; step by step he had advanced without a single rebuff, up to the point at which it was natural to suppose that all would become clear, and at that point he was suddenly stopped, repulsed, overwhelmed by an invincible prejudice and an immovable resolution. There was nothing to be done with this man. "If he would only hear reason," said Sydney. But he stopped his ears, and wouldn't hear anything. If he could only be brought to see the truth—but how can a man see who shuts his eyes? Your only chance is to startle him, so that he shall see and hear before he knows what he is about. Sydney felt the temptation of a *coup-de-théâtre*. If Helen and her child could by any means be brought to Fenbury Park—into the library—into Mr. Rivers's very presence; if he could be made to see them, and talk to them, before he knew who they were! But Sydney knew too little as yet to try that last resource. Other ways must be examined and attempted first.

He had now to consider what was to be done.

The field before him was dismal, and he entered it with a sore heart ; for the very first step which he made in it brought him face to face with the necessity of coming to an understanding with the sisters as to Helen's real position. He acknowledged to himself, that in the presence of this necessity he felt like a coward. He was thankful that the state of Helen's health made an immediate communication impossible. He was glad to say to himself that it must be put off. Yet, eagerly as he caught at the delay, it never occurred to him to disentangle himself from the office altogether. He might have told Mr. Rivers plainly that Helen was under a delusion, and that it behoved him to remove it. But he shuddered when he thought of the cold, hard, brief, written sentence which would probably have followed, and in which the two lonely girls would have read their doom. He turned his thoughts to the Henderson family, and deliberated much as to the best mode of approaching them—hoped much as to the possibility of re-establishing terms of friendship and harmony between them and the sisters ; but he did not purpose making use of the Hendersons to break the blow which must fall sooner or later. That terrible privilege he reserved for himself. It seemed to him that so it must be. When he contemplated it, and shrank from it, he reminded himself that Eva had no mother, and that she

ought to be told that there was no hope, with a mother's tenderness.

He did not, however, absolutely abandon hope. So soon as it should be practicable to talk to Helen on the matter, he intended to learn from her all the particulars of her supposed marriage, and to ascertain whether there was a chance that it might turn out to be good in law. He mistrusted her a little; and poor Eva's vague general statements, made on her authority, did not go for much till they were attested. He had a lurking fear that Helen, who had evidently been willing to sacrifice her friends to her passionate and reckless affection, might not have refused to sacrifice herself; that her conscience might have been appeased by some process which convinced her that her union was divinely sanctioned; and that she might have been induced to despise human safeguards, and to disregard, or disbelieve in, the inevitable consequences. If this were so, he knew that there was no help for her in this world. But he would not believe it to be so till he had made sure that there was not a loophole for escape; and he did not intend to give up his search after Captain Adrian Rivers. It was just possible that he might be less hard-hearted than his uncle, and that if he were made fully aware of the wretchedness he had caused, he might be willing to atone for it. But this was the faintest hope of all. Sydney entirely believed

that no hardness upon earth equals the hardness of the man who is habituated to self-indulgence. If passion had ceased, there was no chance that pity might take its place. The only chance to which Sydney looked here was, that there might still be a remnant of passion capable of being kindled into a flame, if duly fostered. The man might be for the present a victim of circumstances which he had himself called into existence, but from which he might nevertheless desire to escape, if he could.

Sydney had a little business to do on his own account when he returned home. First it was a private word with Jessy. He spoke to her gently, but very seriously. "Jessy, is there a letter for me which you have kept back, because Robert told you to do so?"

Jessy was overwhelmed. "Oh, yes!" she said, tremblingly, producing the letter. "I didn't mean the least harm; it was only for a few days; it was to prevent anything unpleasant—indeed, *indeed*, Sydney."

"I'm not going to scold you," said Sydney. "I know perfectly well that you meant no harm. But I want you to promise me solemnly that you will never do such a thing again, nor anything at all approaching to it."

Jessy promised in an instant.

Sydney gave her a kiss. "I am very sorry," said he, "that Bertie should have asked you to

do such a thing ; and I'm sure you didn't consent with quite an easy conscience."

" No, indeed," answered Jessy ; " I refused at first, and I was very much afraid about it ; and it was only because it was for a few days, and just to prevent mamma's being grieved——"

" I understand," said Sydney ; " but, Jessy dear, always listen to your own conscience another time. Be sure that if you are afraid a thing is wrong, it's safest not to do it, unless you have the opportunity of talking it over with somebody whom you can thoroughly trust, and so making up your mind about it. I am only not angry with you because I am sure that you were completely bewildered ; but I can hardly tell you *how* seriously I think of it. I don't think I could bring myself to forgive it another time."

" Oh, Sydney !" exclaimed Jessy, appalled at such words from the brother who was never out of temper.

" Yes, indeed, Jessy. It seems to me that the truth of a man's home ought to be perfect, and the least trickery is such a wound, that if I once felt it to be intentional, I could not recover from it. Besides, a letter addressed to me is as much my property as my purse is, and to keep it from me is simply a theft."

It was so unusual for Sydney to stand upon his rights, that Jessy felt almost wronged by his doing it. But the extreme earnestness of his

manner subdued her. She reiterated her promise, and then Sydney having read his letter, and convinced himself that there was very little to be said in Robert's defence, addressed himself to the task of making the matter as smooth to his mother as he could. He had undertaken, as a matter of course, to tell her. It was a great shock to her. The short time of doubtful security was over, and the new disappointment seemed to render future security almost impossible. She grieved and lamented, and Sydney comforted and cheered her.

Robert was really very sorry, he said—really very anxious to do well in his present situation. Some men were much longer in growing up than others ; and there was a great deal of boyishness about Robert; but every year made it more and more likely that he would be steady in future. They must make up their minds to struggle through a certain time of doubt and difficulty with him, but it would be all right in the end.

“I only hope, my dearest boy, that you haven't anything to pay for him *this* time,” said poor Mrs. Lennard.

“No, no; *I* hope not,” answered Sydney; “I have heard nothing like it.”

It was all he could say, for in his heart he felt a pretty strong conviction that he *should* have something to pay in the end.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE GENTLEMAN WITH THE FRUIT.

CVA received her visitor with perfect composure. Timidity was not at any time one of her characteristics, and at the present time her mind had no room for it. There was a curious discrepancy between her manner and her appearance, which was found to be peculiarly piquant. She was so small, so fair, so delicate, the contour and expression of her face in repose were so childish, that you expected to find in her a good deal of that dependent weakness which is supposed to be so attractive in woman. But Eva generally spoke with her head up, unabashed, calm, almost haughty in her ways and movements. The surprise did not repel you; it rather fascinated you, because the creature was apparently able to will so much, and to do so little. It was like playing at being a queen. It would never have crossed your mind to call that tiny, soft, fearless, impetuous girl a strong-minded woman; but you

might, perhaps, have said that she was a strong-minded baby.

The servant announced Mr. Wilton, and Mr. Wilton walked in with a good deal of *empressement* and assurance, which evidently suffered a check in the first moment. It was simply her self-possession which confounded him, and of this she was wholly unconscious. He expected to see some sort of agitation, either of pleasure or alarm, and he was quite prepared to respond to the one, or to chase away the other. He expected to see some sort of consciousness of the peculiarity of the position; some doubt whether it were perfectly correct, or safe, or usual, this *tête-à-tête* without an introduction; but he did not in the least expect to be received as though he were walking into a London drawing-room, under the eyes of an unimpeachable chaperon, and he did not exactly know what to make of it. After a few hurried inquiries about the invalid, he introduced the subject of the "business" on which he was supposed to call.

"I have discovered," said he, "the name of the fellow who annoyed you the other evening. He ought to be punished. It's only right to follow the matter up. And I have called to-day to ask whether you have any objection to appear and give evidence against him?"

"Appear!" exclaimed Eva. "Where! What do you mean?"

"Oh ! in a court of justice," he replied. "It's a very simple matter, and I would take the greatest possible care of you. Only I wanted to know your wishes about it. There is nothing to frighten you. You have only to rely upon me, and I'll see you safe through it."

He had at least the satisfaction of upsetting Eva's composure by this proposition. All women are born with an innate, unconquerable horror of a court of justice, as a place in which they may be made to say all sorts of things that they do not mean, and supposed to mean all sorts of things that they do not say—a place, moreover, in which they will assuredly be treated with incivility, and openly ridiculed by mobs of lawyers for any little slip of the tongue which they may make out of pure nervousness. Few would not submit to any amount of inconvenience or injury short of actual ruin, rather than undergo the punishment of being righted by the laws of their country. And it certainly does seem hard—and not at first sight perfectly logical—that because a lady's neighbour annoys her by keeping a savage dog, therefore she should be compelled to tell an assemblage of her fellow-countrymen how old she was last birthday, and whether she has any unpaid bills in her desk.

When Eva understood what was said to her, she blushed excessively, and put her hands together with a quick movement of dismay.

"Oh, pray don't!" she cried. "I should dislike it more than anything in the world. Indeed, I couldn't do it."

He followed up his advantage. "What shall I do to help you?" said he. "I cannot bear that you should be made to do anything you dislike. Yet I don't at this moment see how it is to be prevented."

"But, surely," answered Eva, "if I do not wish to have the man punished, no more notice need be taken of it. I can't be made a plaintiff against my will, can I?"

She put it doubtfully, for she thought of the law much as one might be supposed to think of an escaped lunatic, that it was supernaturally strong, highly dangerous, and utterly inconsistent; that if once you came in contact with it, there was no saying what it might do to you, and that your only chance of safety was to keep well out of its way.

"Not a plaintiff, but a witness," he replied. "The rascal is in custody already upon some other charge, I believe, and you and I may be obliged to go and give evidence against him, or identify him. Do you know what a subpœna is?"

"I think I have heard the word," said poor Eva.

"Well, you know, we might be subpœnaed, and then we couldn't help ourselves. But I think I know a way of preventing it—yes, I am

nearly sure I can manage it. It will be the greatest delight to me if I can do you a service."

"Oh ! I am so very much obliged to you," said Eva. "Pray prevent it if you possibly can. I cannot bear the thought of it."

"Rely upon me," answered he. "I would a hundred times rather go to prison myself than suffer you to encounter the smallest annoyance. I will arrange the matter this morning, if possible. Shall you walk at your usual hour this afternoon ? Because, you know, if so, I could meet you, and tell you all about it."

"No, I don't think I shall," replied Eva. "Perhaps you could kindly leave a message for me with the woman of the house, as I don't think I shall be able to leave my sister to-day."

It was instinct which made Eva refuse to appoint a meeting. The instinct of a pure-hearted girl is a mighty safeguard, so long as neither her feelings nor her vanity are interested in suppressing it. The chief reason why we are careful to hedge about her inexperience is that till she has been tried we cannot be sure whether her feelings or her vanity are likely to be too easily excited or not. Mr. Wilton was baffled, and he found that he was not making half so much way as he intended. He had just tact enough to avoid an actual rebuff. He stayed as much longer as he dared, and was sufficiently devoted, complimentary, and familiar to puzzle and trouble Eva

a good deal. But when he was taking his leave, which he did not do till he could not help it, poor Eva's inexperience came to his aid in a most unexpected manner. She thought him very kind, and she was anxious not to seem ungrateful, and not to show him the slightest rudeness. She was quite sure that she ought not to make arrangements for walking alone with him. But she thought that it would be quite right and proper to receive him at home, as soon as Helen should be well enough to make her appearance. Accordingly she asked him to tea, to his infinite astonishment and delight.

"In a few days," she said, "I hope my sister will be able to come down-stairs; and then I hope we may have the pleasure of seeing you at tea."

Eva was dismayed and confounded by the rapture with which her little invitation was accepted, and she was obliged to get rid of her admirer by a very decided statement that she was wanted in the sick-room. But she took a few minutes to recover herself before she went into the sick-room to report the proceedings of the morning. A very young girl is sometimes unfairly reproached for the compliments she has permitted and the encouragement which she is supposed to have given, when nothing comes of them. It should be remembered that she takes her life as she finds it, and has at first no other life with

which she can compare it. If she is popular and prosperous, she takes a very large amount of attention as a matter of course, and hardly notices it. Society is extremely pleasant to her; but she is at first scarcely aware why it is so. It is only experience which can teach her that some attentions have a more serious meaning than others, or that her own share has been larger than her neighbour's.

Eva speedily dismissed the thought of Mr. Wilton's devotion from her mind. Before she went to school she had been accustomed to hear and see a good deal of the admiration which Helen excited, and which was far enough above the average to give her an erroneously lofty idea of what she was to look for as natural and customary. And she had begun a little career of her own, as a very lovely and charming girl of fifteen occasionally escaping into society before her time might be expected to do, which was quite conformable to the type suggested by Helen. True, Sydney Lennard's manner was very unlike Mr. Wilton's; but she had a kind of vague idea that Sydney Lennard was an exceptional man. She earnestly desired his friendship and approval — a widely different matter from carelessly and contentedly receiving his admiration. She now settled with herself that Mr. Wilton was rather pushing, and that she did not quite like such familiar manners on so short an acquaintance. If

any one had reminded her that Sydney Lennard had taken her by both hands on the first day of his introduction to her, she would not have known what answer to give, except, "Yes; but it was so *very* different!" And her instinct would have been a perfectly safe guide here. It was *not* a safe guide, as we have seen, in the matter of giving invitations to tea; but the rule here was to be determined by knowledge, not instinct, and Eva's knowledge was at fault. Reviewing Mr. Wilton's manner during this last interview, it occurred to her to doubt whether he was quite a gentleman. "Probably," said she to herself, "Mrs. Matthews knows who he is. I will ask."

Accordingly, when Mrs. Matthews was laying the cloth for dinner, which she did in a solemn silence not usual with her, Eva put her question— "The gentleman who called on me to-day is named Wilton, Mrs. Matthews," said she. "Do you happen to know who he is?"

Mrs. Matthews stopped short, flushed high, and looked the young lady sternly in the face. "You know, I suppose, Miss!" said she in a manner intended to be deeply significant.

"No, indeed I don't," replied Eva, simply; "but I want to find out."

"Then you must employ somebody else if you please, Miss," said Mrs. Matthews, resuming her occupation and speaking very shortly. "I'm not used to searching after strange gentlemen."

Eva thought this an odd answer, but she did not take the trouble to meditate long upon it. She was quite aware that Mrs. Matthews was a testy, irritable person, and she concluded that something had put her out of humour. After dinner the maid, Ann, came into the room rather hurriedly, and addressed her in a confidential manner : " Mercy on us, Miss, never you mind her being so cross. He's the son of Wilton's of Emberlee, the richest house in all the county, and a fine, handsome, fairspoken young gentleman too, that nobody can't say a word against. You just be true to him, and never mind her."

Ann's manner and words amused Eva immensely, but did not alarm her in the least. She treasured them up, in the hope of bringing a smile to Helen's face by recording them. There were no smiles that evening. Helen had promised not to speak on the one subject till regular permission had been obtained ; she regretted the promise, and perhaps a little resented the fact that it had been demanded of her, and she could not bring herself to speak of anything else. She listened very languidly to Eva's account of her morning visitor ; thought the "court of justice" part of the story rather odd, but by no means incredible ; and shook her head when the tea-party was suggested, saying, in a melancholy voice, " Oh ! it will be a long time before I am fit for that." She was gentle and calm, but she encountered all

Eva's attempts to cheer her or talk to her with an impenetrable sadness, more disheartening than it is possible to describe. Eva struggled against the dejection which she felt overcoming herself, and said, inwardly, "If I lose my spirits, it will be terrible for us both!" She quite longed for leave to open the floodgates of Helen's heart. Immeasurable were the pity and tenderness with which she contemplated Helen, thinking how hard her lot was, and how well she was bearing it. She gave her credit for the utmost self-command whenever she was not actually in tears. But not the less did the evening drag wearily and painfully away; and the only consolatory topics which poor Eva could find to dwell upon when she was going to bed were, that every day and night passed away were so much gained on the road towards recovery, and that the mere absence of those violent fits of hysterical weeping, the mere power of being composed, *must* be a good sign.

The next morning there was another superb bouquet of flowers and a basket of grapes on the breakfast-table. Attached to the bouquet was a little note in which Mr. Wilton informed Eva that he must see her again on the business which he was endeavouring to arrange for her, and that he hoped to find her disengaged at about twelve o'clock. At twelve o'clock accordingly he came, prolonged his interview as much as he possibly could, and again annoyed Eva by an indefinable

something in his manner. When, however, he told her that he had "seen the magistrate," and that he hoped to be able to prevent her having to appear to give evidence, but that there was still a little difficulty, and that he could not be quite certain about it for a day or two; she thanked him heartily and never suspected him for a moment. If he had told her that he had seen the Lord Chancellor on her behalf, and that she could avoid any further annoyance by consenting to be made a ward in Chancery—a simple operation which he could manage for her at any time—I think that she would have believed him unhesitatingly. He disarmed all her suspicions during the latter part of his conversation with her, by the extreme kindness of his interest in Helen. He suggested that nothing was likely to do her so much good as an airing, and that it would be wise to take advantage of the mild weather while it lasted, and to get her out-of-doors before the winter began to close in. He placed himself and a certain charming little basket-carriage, exactly adapted for an invalid, which he averred that his mother had been in the habit of using, entirely at Helen's disposal. A summons should bring him at any hour; the distance from Emberlee was not great, and there was a lovely little wood at the entrance of the grounds in which he was sure that Eva would enjoy a drive. Seeing her eyes kindle at the mention of the wood, and noticing also the

soft gratitude of manner with which she responded to his sympathy for Helen, he developed his plan with great animation. He got a good ten minutes out of Eva by the eloquence with which he described a particular beech-tree with a seat under it, on which he thought that Helen might rest if the morning were warm, and enjoy a really beautiful view. This view he proceeded to sketch in a manner which enchanted his young and eager companion. She expressed the liveliest interest, watched every stroke of the pencil, asked him a hundred questions which he was only too happy to answer, and finally begged the drawing of him that she might carry it up to Helen.

“ Could you wait five minutes ? ” said she, without a doubt or a misgiving, and looking lovelier in her excitement than he had before believed it possible for any human being to look.

“ Five hours, if you like,” he replied.

She laughed, and ran off with the sketch. She caught Helen at a fortunate moment. Even in her profound despondency there were intervals when the darkness seemed to warm a little with the breath of some inner light, and this was one of them. The weary pertinacious thoughts for ever wandering over the same dry ground, seeking rest and finding none, had found a mirage tempting them onwards in one direction, and feeding them with unsubstantial hope and cou-

rage which were to melt away as they advanced. Some one of those devices which imagination makes to aid it in escaping from its own terrors ; some ingenious structure carefully put together, and standing as if it were real till a faint breeze touches it and shivers it to pieces. It really does not signify what the particular fancy was, but it had satisfied her for the moment, and she was in a state to be soothed and diverted by Eva's little history. Eva's rapture may be conceived. In an instant she was at the top of joy. She sparkled about the room like a sunbeam ; she related all her adventures, mimicked Mrs. Matthews' solemnity and the maid Ann's sympathy, and Mr. Wilton's combination of devoted gallantry and habitual slang, in the happiest manner—almost making Helen laugh by the rapidity of her transformations. Then she knelt down by the bed-side and exhibited the drawing, heightening all the touches, developing all the details, running out into all sorts of mysteries of light and shade, and colour and atmosphere, in a way that would have confounded the artist himself, and winding up her eloquent periods with, “you would like to see it, wouldn't you, darling ? I think it would do you *such* good !” and a hundred tender questions and ejaculations of the same sort. Helen could not resist her. She raised herself a little on the pillow and caressed the golden head that was bending over her so fondly.

"I think," said she, "a little change would be good for you too, Eva."

"Oh, yes! I want it so much; I long for it. A drive into this beautiful new place, before the leaves are off the trees, and a drive in a pony-carriage, too—you know how fond I am of a pony-carriage. Oh! I shall enjoy it more than anything else in the world! Perhaps, when we are out of the town, he'll let me drive."

This delicious possibility completed the picture, and made the temptation invincible. "I wonder whether it's quite right," said Helen, languidly, "to accept so much kindness from a stranger?"

"But, you see, he isn't a stranger; at least, not quite," said Eva; "I have seen him four times; I know quite as much of him as I should know of any partner; and if you remember, Helen, two years ago we were driven in a pony-chaise to that great pic-nic in Moreton Woods by a man who was only a partner."

Helen did remember. Some vague idea floated before her mind that there was a considerable difference between the two examples, as they went in nine carriages to the pic-nic in Moreton Woods, from a common starting-place, and the "partner" who drove them was a frightful little middle-aged man engaged to be married; but when people earnestly desire a precedent they can make one out of anything; so Helen

made no answer, and Eva went on, greatly strengthened by the recollection of that frightful little middle-aged man.

“ Besides, we know all about this man as well as if we had known him for years and years—Mr. Wilton, of Emberlee. I remember Dr. Simpkinson talking about the Wilton family one day, and I am quite sure from the sort of way in which he talked about them that they were as respectable as it is possible for people to be—something more than respectable, indeed; I fancy them quite leaders in society. And then you know the peculiar way in which I made acquaintance with him makes a great difference. In the first place, my being so frightened, and his being so kind, made us much more intimate than we could have become so soon if we had only been introduced in the regular manner; and then the way in which he behaved when he saw that horrid man frightening me, shows him to be a nice sort of a person. If he had not been nice himself, you know he might have——”

But here Eva came to a full stop in the flow of her argument. To tell the truth, she had not the slightest idea what she was going to say next. A man must have been very conspicuously the reverse of “a nice sort of person” to have done anything except what Mr. Wilton did under the circumstances in which Mr. Wilton was apparently placed. It was not to be imagined that he

would help an unknown ruffian to frighten a young lady, and it was almost equally unimaginable that he should stand by to see her frightened without interfering. Helen, however, was not likely to notice the weak places in her sister's reasoning. She was not nineteen herself; and from what we know of her past history, we cannot be surprised at finding her a very inefficient chaperon. It was hardly to have been expected that she should have felt even such faint and half-formed prudential doubts as did flit across her mind for a moment. She was not capable of withstanding Eva's eagerness, and she felt the first stirring of a slight wish in her own breast. In the utter exhaustion of spirits which had overwhelmed her, this was too delightful a novelty to be resisted either by Eva or by herself. She made but one more slight hesitation.

"Mr. Wilton, of Emberlee," repeated she; "I wonder if he is married?"

"He *may* be, certainly," said honest Eva, "but I don't think he *is*."

"Well," said Helen, sinking wearily back, "there are two of us together, so I suppose it's all right. You can settle about it, Eva dear."

"Then I shall settle for a drive to-morrow, if it's quite fine and warm, at twelve o'clock, so that we may get just the prime of the day—shall I?"

Helen acquiesced by silence.

"And you really will rather like it, Helen

darling? It won't tire you? You really do wish for it, just a little?"

"I want to go to sleep," said Helen, hiding herself under the bed-clothes.

Eva stole away. "Ah!" thought she to herself, "how silly I was to put such a direct question to her; I nearly spoilt it all. I must remember never to do that again. The only hope is to coax her into a little more cheerfulness without letting her find it out. If she has to stop and consider only for an instant, poor darling! she remembers all the reasons she has for being so miserable, and then she falls back again into despair; but, as time goes on, she won't be able to help growing a little brighter, and I can see that it is beginning. There cannot be the slightest doubt that she really liked looking at the drawing and hearing about the wood; and I am sure she wished to go there—I am quite sure of it—I saw almost half a smile; but I can quite fancy that if she were to see that I think she wishes for it she would be ashamed, and it would make her turn in the other direction. I must take it all upon myself; I must seem to want it very much indeed, and then she won't like to disappoint me, and she will do herself good without knowing it. Some day, by and by, when she has recovered and is like herself again, I shall be able to explain to her that I wasn't really selfish. In the meantime, I must not mind letting her

think me just a little selfish since it is for her sake I do it."

Eva went in to Mr. Wilton, who was beginning to grow very impatient for her reappearance. "My sister is very much obliged to you indeed," said she, "and, if she is strong enough, she will enjoy a drive exceedingly. Will to-morrow do?"

Come, thought the young man, she is certainly anxious to lose no time about it. He answered that he had no engagement, and to-morrow would suit delightfully.

"Then I think twelve o'clock would be the best time," said Eva, "because, you see, I am so very much afraid lest she should catch cold, as it is the first time of going out. And it must only be for a little while the first time, if you please."

She means to go more than once, thought he, exultingly.

Then Eva fixed her beautiful fervent eyes upon him, and a most pathetic tone came into her voice as she addressed him. "You have not the slightest idea how ill Helen has been," said she, "and there are reasons why she is very, *very* unhappy. I don't know when I could have persuaded her to come out of doors if it had not been for this. It is such a delight to see her begin to take the least interest in anything, and I am so grateful to you for it. Please you must understand that we must say very little to her, we must just talk to each other before her and

take no notice of her ; and if she seems too much tired, or if she should begin to cry, you must please not to mind it, and not to mind having to turn back. It is only the first time you know, and she will be better afterwards."

Ever since Mr. Wilton had made acquaintance with Eva he had been in the greatest possible uncertainty about her. He had wavered from one view to another—taking up first one key to unlock the mystery, and then another of opposite construction. Always, when he was away, he thought that he had been a fool to be so scrupulous, and that he might press as forward as he liked. Always, in her presence, the *empressement* and the familiarity with which he began were checked, he knew not how ; and some instinct saved him from talking and acting in such a manner as would have opened her eyes to the equivocal position in which she stood, and caused her to dismiss him at once and for ever. When the circumstances of that position are fairly considered, as they must have appeared to him, it will be seen that it was no ordinary power which could keep an ordinary man, such as he undoubtedly was, at a moderately respectful distance. It was the power of perfect innocence and modesty not to be mistaken, over a mind not incapable of seeing them when they were presented to it. He was puzzled and surprised at himself, but so it was. He could not have

spoken lightly of her to one of his gay acquaintance. Face to face with her he could hardly manage to be as free as he had been with many a flirting young lady of the highest fashion at a ball. He could only say to himself that it was the most extraordinary, anomalous, unintelligible state of things that ever was, but since he had the power of cultivating the acquaintance of such a very charming creature in such a very questionable manner, he would certainly make the most of his luck while it lasted. As for compromising her by the way in which the acquaintance was made and prosecuted, that was neither his business nor his fault; and he left that part of the matter altogether out of consideration. The effect which her last little speech produced upon him was that he was bewildered, impressed, and touched, and could not find it in his heart to put an unfavourable construction upon her proposition, that he and she should talk together and take no notice of Helen. He stammered out his perfect agreement with all her suggestions, and found himself saying something about introducing her to his mother before he knew where he was.



CHAPTER XV.

A DRIVE TO EMBERLEE.

THE next morning, while Eva was sitting alone at breakfast, Sydney's letter was brought to her. We know its contents. She read it through once, passing very lightly over those sentences which referred to the gentleman with the fruit, and giving her chief attention to the advice about Helen. On this she meditated deeply. Since she parted from Sydney, his view of Helen's position (so far as she understood it), and of her own consequent duties—of the part which she had to play in restoring, if it should be possible, happiness to this adored sister—had been constantly before her mind. Dr. Simpkinson's off-hand notions about doing as she was bid—going back to the Hendersons, and accepting their future arrangement of her own destiny and Helen's, whatever it might happen to be—had been too impracticable to obtain a moment's consideration from her. Extreme anger and immovable obstinacy were the

only feelings of which she was conscious when she remembered them. But very different emotions had been awakened by what Sydney Lennard said to her. Much that he had said was painful, much was doubtful, something was obscure ; but so far as she was able to enter into it, and to consider it, she felt an ever-deepening conviction, which was almost a fear, that all was true and right. She did not wish to believe these hard things, or to face these great difficulties. She would far rather have been left to her own course—rapid, headlong, blind, driven onwards only by her heart, and never pausing to look around her. In this case she would simply have clung to Helen, and devoted her life to her, making at the same time every possible exertion to keep out of the reach of the Hendersons, and taking no trouble about the truant husband, of whose worthlessness she was fully convinced, and whose return she did not desire, except as a means of making Helen happier. She had never asked herself how life would go on under these conditions, nor whether it was possible that it should continue under these conditions for any considerable time. She had only a vague but strong notion that she could bear anything, do anything, give up anything, for Helen's sake ; and that when any fresh contingency occurred, she should find out somehow a way to encounter it.

But Sydney had opened her eyes, and she

could not shut them again, and she was too honest to blindfold herself, and try to forget what she had seen ; on the contrary, she tried with all her might to see clearly. She did not lose her hold upon the conviction to which Sydney had brought her, that it was right to search out the truth, and that sooner or later the truth, when found, must be set before Helen. She accepted gravely, anxiously, doubtfully, the task which he now proposed to her, and made herself ready for a distressing conversation with Helen as she best could. Her heart sank, but not for long. She sprang to the conclusion that the hated brother-in-law was either better than she thought him, and that he would return and make Helen happy, or that he was as bad as she thought him, and Helen would find it out, and forget him. There was only a certain time of darkness and misery to be lived through, and then the light and the joy would come. I know, she thought, that everybody must go through a time of darkness and misery in the course of life. I have always heard that nobody is happy from the beginning to the end. This is my time of darkness ; but I have no right to give way under it, because it is not my grief, but Helen's. I have nothing to do but to be brave and patient, and to keep up her heart.

When she had come to this point in her reflections, she read the letter over again, and this

time she noticed the extreme earnestness and reiteration of Sydney's warnings about Mr. Wilton. Her first emotion was one of girlish impatience. "What can he know of this man?" thought she. "Why should he be so afraid about nothing? It's all nonsense." But she considered it again, and certain half-formed doubts and misgivings in her own heart as to the prudence and propriety of her new acquaintance came to the aid of Sydney's arguments. If she had liked Sydney less and Mr. Wilton more, she might very probably have had a fit of wilfulness, and determined to go on her way without regarding the counsels now offered to her. But Mr. Wilton had, at present, failed to make the slightest impression upon her beyond her gratitude on Helen's account. He was very good looking and very good natured. She thought that he was rather like a wax head in a hairdresser's shop, and she was pretty sure that he was not clever. A few years later Eva might, perhaps, enjoy playing with such a lover, and entangle herself in the course of her play further than she intended or wished. But now her young ideal was lofty, and her untried judgments were severe. Good nature and good looks went a very little way towards satisfying them. She gave him up without a regret. But she did not give up the wood, and the chance of being allowed to drive a pair of ponies, without a great deal of very serious regret. She was child enough

to be almost ready to cry at the loss of her treat. It never occurred to her that Helen would be likely to make any difficulties in the matter ; but in this she was, as we shall see, altogether mistaken. She went up-stairs to Helen, after putting Sydney's letter carefully away in her writing-case.

"Nellie," said she, sitting down on the bed, "I have had a letter from Mr. Lennard."

"Is he coming?" asked Helen. She vividly remembered Sydney's skill and tenderness, and felt a conviction that when he came again, he would cure her altogether ; and she was sufficiently better to have begun to wish to live and get well.

"Soon, but not immediately," answered Eva ; "but do you know, Nellie dear, from what he says I am afraid that we have been imprudent in making acquaintance with this new man, and that we had better give it up."

Helen opened her eyes very wide.

"From what he says?" repeated she, with an intonation very familiar to Eva, and denoting opposition. "What does he know about it?"

"Only what I told him. I said that we had made a new acquaintance, and that he was very kind in sending you fruit and flowers."

"Was that all?" said Helen. "Oh, then he does not know that we know who Mr. Wilton is, and all about him ; so it makes no difference."

Did it make no difference? Eva was puzzled.

"If you don't mind, darling," said she, coaxingly, "I would so much rather give it up. The sort of things Mr. Lennard says about it quite frighten me, and I think it would be safer to give it up."

"Give what up?" answered Helen, in a voice of melancholy amazement. "My first airing?"

"Oh! no, no; of course, not that. But could we not go together in a hired carriage, and take baby, anywhere you like?"

"Very well," said Helen; "you must write and put Mr. Wilton off, then, and I would much rather not go out at all. It's no disappointment to me, so you need not look shocked about it, Eva. I did not wish for it in the least, and I think I am much better at home."

"But, dearest, dearest Helen ——"

"Please, don't talk any more; I'm so tired."

Eva stood dismayed. What terrible mischief she had done! If Helen had been well and happy, Eva would probably have been angry, and might have carried her point in the end by sheer vigour. But there was no being angry with this pale, persecuted sufferer, and Eva simply set herself to repair the evil she had inadvertently caused, after a passing emotion of displeasure with Sydney Lennard.

"May I just say one little word, darling?"

entreated she, timidly. "I think, if you feel able, we ought to go just for this one airing, because it would seem strange, and rude, and almost ungrateful, to Mr. Wilton, if we send him away after having agreed to it, and after having been so much obliged for it."

"So *I* thought," murmured Helen.

"And it's such a beautiful morning," continued Eva, moving the curtains, and letting in a shower of sunshine for an instant, "I think it must do you good. Don't you think it would be a good plan if you were to get up and dress now, that you may have a long rest before the carriage comes?"

"But I don't understand what I'm going to do," said Helen. "Am I to go out with Mr. Wilton or not?"

"Good child!" cried Eva, kissing her; "you are to be managed by me, and to do exactly what I tell you in everything. Mr. Wilton is coming at twelve o'clock, and we are to have our drive with him, and to see the wood, and to stay out just long enough for you to be refreshed, not tired. Will you like that?"

"Just as you please," answered Helen.

Eva brought her the toilette appliances, and helped her through the slow and fatiguing operations of washing and dressing herself. She noted with indescribable satisfaction that there was an undoubted advance in strength. Helen having

been dressed, with many pauses and few words, lay down on the bed to take the long rest which had been arranged for her. But she said, before Eva left the room—

“I don’t see what Mr. Lennard has to do with our plans. He is a very good doctor, of course ; but I think you don’t know much more of him than you know of Mr. Wilton.

“Oh, yes,” cried Eva, “indeed I do know a great deal more. He was here more than a week, and we were together all day long ; and he was so kind and so sensible. I could trust him for everything.”

“Well,” said Helen, “I think you ought to be a little careful about not getting too intimate with him. I suppose you have to write to him about my health ?”

“Yes,” answered Eva ; “you know what good he did you, and—”

“Oh, *I* know,” said Helen ; “but I think, Eva, you need only write to him as a doctor, and you needn’t tell him about other things.”

“But, Helen, he is a friend—the only friend we have, I think. When he comes again you will see what he is, and then you will quite understand.”

“Still, I don’t want you to write to him about me—I mean about anything except my health. You must be *very* careful, Eva. You don’t know—and I can’t tell you : but if you love me at all,

you'll say nothing about me to anybody. And now I'll go to sleep."

Eva, who stood trembling with fear, lest a positive promise should be demanded of her, was glad to hasten from the room. Her difficulties increased. If Helen should take a prejudice against Sydney Lennard, what was to become of them? It may be safely asserted that when a woman is in doubt, trouble, or difficulty, her object is to find, if possible, some one whom she can trust. If she has only herself to trust, it is hard work for her. Of course, if she is a sensible woman, she learns it by degrees like every other task which life sets before her. But it is the most unpalatable of all lessons, and she learns it painfully and reluctantly. Long after she has it by heart, when she has succeeded in walking warily, steadily, and safely, without help, you may see by the eager joy with which she grasps a hand held out to her, how unnatural and unsatisfactory she has found the process. If this is true of women in general, and true of them at all times of life, we need not wonder that a child like Eva clung with all her might to the supporting hand which she had found to be so strong and so gentle. She could not give it up. She knew, by an intimation clearer than reason, that Helen could not guide her. She was ready to give up everything in the world for and to Helen, with a love that was too much like worship to be

wise, and she would have been amply rewarded for any sacrifice by the delight of seeing Helen happy. But though she did not analyze or understand her own feelings in this respect, it is certain that her subjection to Helen might be described almost always as "giving up." She preferred Helen's will to her own, but not Helen's judgment. In fact, even while they were children, Helen had been accustomed to choose for herself in most things, but to rely on Eva's judgment. Now their relation was changed. There was a mystery in Helen's life, which exhibited itself only as a great wrong inflicted, and a terrible grief endured, and Eva had to receive it as a mystery, and to give no help but sympathy. Therefore she poured out her whole soul in this sympathy which was the only channel open. But she could not feel any confidence that Helen was doing what was best for herself; on the contrary, she feared deeply that Helen might be unconsciously doing the worst. And just when she was falling into despair came a counsellor able and willing to understand, to help, to lead them both, and just when she was rising into hope and comfort again by his aid, she was told to give him up. It was impossible; she *could* not do it. It was very much harder to her now to stand alone than it had seemed before Sydney came. This was not only because he had opened her eyes to dangers and difficulties, but also be-

cause she had experienced the consolation of guidance.

I think that she would have utterly despaired if she had been a few years older, but her extreme youth helped her. It was very difficult to break her down ; she was invincibly elastic ; the pressure of the future upon her was not intolerable ; on the contrary, the future was an untrodden land flowing with milk and honey, in which all sorrows should be transformed into joys. An older woman would have shrunk from the task set before her at this particular moment ; would have felt that the difficulties arising out of Helen's character and temperament were likely to increase ; would have thought with dismay and disgust of the subterfuges and reserves which must be necessary in order to serve her against her will, and prevent her from becoming jealous of Sydney's influence. Eva thought nothing of the kind. Such prudential measures as she adopted were the result of natural tact, not of deliberate reflection. She was quite certain that Sydney and Helen would understand each other, and that after his next visit everything would go smoothly. To that visit she began to look forward as a grand turning-point, and in order to accelerate its arrival, she replied to Sydney by return of post. This is the letter which she wrote, and which he received two days after his visit to Fenbury Park :—

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—Thank you very much for your letter. I hope to have a conversation with Helen this evening, but I am afraid she does not wish me to tell you or anybody anything about her. I am quite sure that it will be different when she has seen you again. You remember she hardly knows you yet ; when you are able to come again and to talk to her yourself, everything will be so much easier. She is *much* better. She is to go out for an airing to-day. We are going with the gentleman about whom I told you in my last letter—his name is Wilton, and his father’s place is Emberlee, about three miles from this town. Helen thought it would be rude and ungrateful to refuse to go with him after we had accepted. He is very kind to us. If you know any good reason against our being acquainted with him, could you tell us what it is ? When you come, you will be able to settle it. I have left off walking out because he wanted to come with me, but I am quite well. I shall write to you again to-morrow, after I have had my talk with Helen.—Believe me to be,

“Yours truly and gratefully,
“EVA LAKE.”

Having sent this note to the post, and feeling a sort of security in the fact that Sydney would know about the airing twenty-four hours after it took place, Eva began to enjoy herself. The

faint delicate flush which excitement, and the little exertion of walking down stairs brought into Helen's face, gave her a look of improved health delightful to the wistful eyes that watched her. Good manners—always a powerful motive with both the sisters—compelled Helen to exert an unusual amount of self-control, and she was not only calm when Mr. Wilton was introduced to her, but she actually smiled a little smile so beautiful and so pleasant to look upon, that Eva could scarcely keep from kissing her. Their visitor was evidently touched and astonished, and indeed it would have been difficult to see the sisters together, and remain quite unmoved. The fair fragile, tremulous creature on the sofa, looking so young, moving so feebly, changing colour every instant, uttering her faint courtesies in a voice so musical, showing, under the hood which careful hands had drawn about her bonnet, a face of such remarkable beauty; she was not only an artist's ideal of an invalid, but she appealed so instantly and so eloquently to your sympathies, that not a man in the world could have seen her without desiring at once to do something for her. And Eva's blooming health, eager gestures, rapid and girlish grace, all softened and penetrated by the most intense anxious tenderness as she supported and helped her sister, made the most fascinating contrast that could be imagined.

No doubt their visitor was fascinated. He

became almost helpless in his vehement efforts to be of use. He put on Helen's last cloak upside down, trod upon it three times between the sofa and the door, and very nearly threw Helen herself down stairs at last, because he could not make up his mind practically whether he was to carry her or only to support her. As Eva watched him the thought flashed across her mind how quick, how ready, how skilful Sydney Lennard would have been in his place. It was perhaps a little unfair to compare them, as the one was used to the care and tenderness of the sick by the necessities of his position, while the other had never stood by a bedside in his life. When he had fairly lifted Helen into the carriage and helped to make a sort of temporary couch for her with cushions and shawls, he turned to give his hand to Eva. She was, however, too quick for him—she ran round and sprang lightly in on the other side—and his face of blank disappointment as he took his seat, was almost comic. Ann, the maid, had presided over their departure with much zeal; Mrs. Matthews did not appear openly, but she watched the whole proceeding from the window with outraged and indignant eyes, and made up her mind, then and there, what she would do on the morrow.

The pony carriage had no driving-seat, but only a rest for the reins. Mr. Wilton sat beside Helen, and guided his small but swift and viva-

cious steeds from that position; Eva was of course opposite to him, as Helen lay across from seat to seat, and occupied with her feet the place opposite to herself. Mr. Wilton thought this the best possible arrangement, as he could stare uninterruptedly under Eva's hat. But when a little word passing between the sisters revealed to him Eva's ambition about driving, the arrangement became better still. He instantly changed places with her, and he had the extreme pleasure of giving the reins into her hands, and besetting her with perpetual instructions for the rest of the way. Her spirits rose, her laughter rang out, she appealed now to him, now to Helen, she boasted of her prowess and her improvement, she asked permission to go "just a little faster, the road was so level and so smooth; wouldn't Helen like the ponies to trot as fast as they possibly could till they came to a hill?" She stood up in order to do her spiriting more effectually, nearly lost her balance, and blushed like a rose when Mr. Wilton caught her. Had the acquaintance been made in natural order, and sanctioned by all the usual forms, and had a wise mother been presiding over it at that moment, she would have contrived to check, by some mild unobtrusive interposition, the child whose gay, innocent glee was so liable to be mistaken for an intention to flirt. Helen only watched her with a slight, languid sense of amusement; Mr.

Wilton encouraged and stimulated her with the utmost delight, and became more familiar every moment.

The shadow of the beech trees did the work of a chaperon for Eva, whose keen sense of the influences of nature could scarcely be surpassed. When she was fairly within the limit of the woodland stillness, she felt no desire to laugh or talk. She gave the reins quietly into Mr. Wilton's hand, went back to her original place, looked, enjoyed, and was silent.

"How grave you are all in a moment," said he, little aware, poor man, that he was confirming by the remark, an idea which had secretly arisen in her heart already, that he had no soul and no sympathy. If we could only know the bricks which we unconsciously hand to those who are building up a fabric, and looking upon it as "our character," how careful we should sometimes be !

She smiled quietly. "Oh !" said she, "I've too much respect for these grave old trees, to make a noise in their presence. Please don't talk."

It was a strong proof of his admiration that he did not think this speech in the least affected. He only looked upon it as a fresh puzzle in the bewitching mystery before him. He resigned himself to a gaze as steady and silent as Eva's, though not at the same objects, till they emerged

from the wood, and came in sight of Emberlee Hall.

“Was that the beech-tree under which you said Helen might rest?” asked Eva, waking up with a sigh, when the broad sunlight poured down upon them again. “That grand old fellow, all red and orange, with his root almost in the little stream? Why did you pass by him without stopping?”

“Because,” said Mr. Wilton, whipping his ponies, “I thought it too cold for a luncheon *al fresco*, and I have got one ready in-doors. Here we are.”

They drew up at the door of the house as he spoke. “Ah!” said Eva, a little startled, “I remember you said that you would be so kind as to introduce us to your mother—does she expect us?”

“She is unluckily not at home to-day,” replied he, as he prepared to lift Helen out of the carriage; “you must allow me to do the honours in her place.”



CHAPTER XVI.

VERY AWKWAED.

AT Emberlee House an event occurred which might have been anticipated by persons of greater experience than Mr. Wilton and Eva. Helen very nearly fainted when she was lifted out of the carriage. It was her first taste of the air of heaven since her illness; half-an-hour's drive would have been quite sufficient for her. The five miles' brisk progress through a fresh autumnal breeze, had appeared to revive her, and had, in reality done her good, though at a somewhat larger expense of fatigue than was necessary; but at the first change of posture, the first attempt to move, her tremulous nerves gave way, and she turned so white, and dropped so helplessly on Mr. Wilton's shoulder, that he appealed to Eva with a scared look as if he thought that she was going to die in his arms. Eva flew to the rescue.

“Only a little faintness,” said she, “it will

pass off. Don't be frightened," and instinctively assuming the command of Mr. Wilton and the servants, she superintended the little procession which carried Helen through the hall, and deposited her on a sofa in the room which had been prepared for them. There was wine on the table, and a few drops revived the invalid; she raised herself on the pillows, and thanked her companions with a smile which carried by storm the hearts of the butler and housekeeper, who were watching her with a stare of dismay almost as broad as their master's. They withdrew, saying to each other and to their associates below stairs, that "Surely such a pretty little couple never was seen in the born world, and they did wonder who they was, and where Mr. George got them."

Meanwhile, Mr. George, greatly relieved, began to do the honours. He had made his arrangements very carefully before starting, and he was quite satisfied with the *coup d'œil* which awaited the sisters. They were in a boudoir, luxuriously and tastefully furnished, decorated with pictures, communicating at one side with a conservatory, and lighted on the other by an immense plate-glass window, which commanded the prettiest view in Emberlee Park. A very picturesque luncheon stood on a table in the centre of the room—the pine-apple, the masses of grapes and peaches in silver baskets, and the

superb turret of flowers which crowned the little feast—made it look like a bit of a banquet by Paul Veronese. There were more substantial viands of course, which did not in any way detract from the charm of the effect, and Helen ate her cold partridge and sipped her champagne with real appetite, and could not restrain her admiration for all she saw.

“What a charming room!” she cried, “it is perfection. Oh! how pleasant never to look up without seeing something pretty!”

Mr. Wilton indulged himself with a little chuckle of satisfaction. “I thought you would like it,” said he, more to Eva than to Helen.

“I ordered luncheon in this room because I thought so. It’s my mother’s boudoir.”

Perhaps it was lucky that Mrs. Wilton was *not* at home.

When luncheon was over it was decided that Eva should be escorted by Mr. Wilton to see the house, and one or two of the best points in the grounds, while Helen rested. Afterwards they were to drive back to Northborough, taking care to start so early that they should reach home before the warmth of the day was over. This arrangement arose so naturally out of the circumstances of the case, that Eva felt no misgivings on the score of propriety. There were a good many little parting attentions to be paid to Helen.

"Where shall we move your sofa?" asked Mr. Wilton.

"Put me just there, please," said Helen, pointing with her tiny finger; "I shall see the view from the window, and those two beautiful pictures, without moving; and if I just turn my head I shall be able to look into the conservatory. It will be so nice."

Eva, always quick and energetic, was beginning to move the light couch on which Helen lay, before Mr. Wilton had time to ring the bell. He laughed and ran to her assistance. As she stooped over Helen, with her great masses of golden hair about her bright face (she had taken off her hat when they first sat down to luncheon), he mentally endorsed the housekeeper's opinion, that "They two was the prettiest little couple that ever was seen."

"I hope you will be here very often," said he, in a rapture of hospitality and admiration. "I wish you would come and stay here altogether. I am sure it would be much more comfortable for you than your lodgings in Northborough. This is such a nice room for an invalid, and the bed-room opens out of it. Look here!" he threw open the door of communication as he spoke, "you could be wheeled in and out on your couch without the slightest fatigue; and whenever the weather is fine you could go out in the grounds—so *much* pleasanter than a street, so much better,

too, for an invalid ; I think you would get well in no time. Do consider it, and let me drive back now, and fetch your traps, instead of driving you home this afternoon."

This was, however, a stretch beyond even Helen, and she negatived the proposition so decidedly, that he dropped it at once. Probably by the time he had finished his speech, certain obstacles to the scheme had occurred to his own recollection. He contented himself, therefore, with saying—

" Well, perhaps you couldn't manage it in such a hurry. But I do hope you'll let me bring you here every day. I know it will do you such good. This is the finest air in the world. Now, Miss Jermyn, are you ready ? All right ! Well, then, we'll step out of this window. Ah ! (with a short chuckle of triumph) you didn't know there was a way out here. I'll show it you. See, the whole of this division of the window slides into the wall like a shutter ; two steps down, and there you are on the lawn. Have you got goloshes ? All right ! What little mites of things they are ! Now, then, I'll just step back and fasten the window."

He did so, gave one friendly short "Take care of yourself," to Helen, by way of adieu, which rather startled her, as she thought he was gone, and then went off with Eva, in a state of the highest satisfaction.

Helen, being left alone, lay at first in a kind of passive enjoyment, without effort of mind or movement of body, merely contemplating what was around her. She thoroughly appreciated the pleasure which she had herself described as that of "seeing something pretty whenever you lift your eyes." She was in that peculiar condition, at once tired and refreshed, which is not uncommon in the earlier stages of convalescence, where the constitution is naturally fine. One feature of this condition is a pleasant incapacity for mental exertion, contrasting vividly with the morbid, feverish tension of the invalid. Your faculties are neither bewildered nor powerless, but they are quiescent, they distinctly refuse to do any sort of work. It is a sort of conscious childhood, in which you know that you were grown up once, and will be so again, but for the present you are in a parenthesis, and you have not the slightest wish to get out of it. Painful thoughts do not fasten upon you—not because you repel them with effort, but because you are, just for a blessed little while, unable to lay hold upon them. Helen was in this mood now—it was only a mood, it would pass away; but it was probably the most agreeable half-hour she had spent since her misfortunes.

As her eyes wandered dreamily from one object to another, they clung longest and returned most frequently to one of the pictures which hung

upon the wall opposite to her couch. It was the portrait of a young woman in full evening dress. She stood on the step of a marble staircase, and was in the act of wrapping herself in a scarlet opera-cloak. The effect of brilliant lamp-light upon her face and figure was forcibly given, and it contrasted well with a wedge of pallid moonshine in the background, just slipping in through the half-opened street door. The lady was turning her head as she tied the strings of her hood, and she seemed to be listening to some one who stood a little above her on the stairs, but who was not included within the limits of the picture. She was tall and finely formed, though on a scale rather too large to be graceful after early youth ; her features were strong but handsome, the complexion glowing, the hair and eyes very dark, and the expression exceedingly animated. The arrangement and colour of the picture caught you at first glance ; it had gathered crowds when it graced the Academy wall. But every one who looked at it and admired it, was conscious of a doubt as to the beauty of the original, of a suspicion that the skill of the painter had been exercised, not only in posing drapery and lighting his figure, not only in fixing the best attitude and the most charming expression, but also in softening and modifying the whole character, so as to make that beautiful in representation which was not actually beautiful in fact. You said to your-

self as you looked, "That *might* be a very handsome woman, but somehow I don't think she *is*."

By this picture Helen was first attracted, then repelled, and finally tormented. She wanted to escape from the spectacle of that bright, bold, prosperous face ; it seemed to triumph over her as she lay there, so small, so solitary, and so helpless. Still, she could not restrain herself from looking at it. She shut her eyes, but opened them again quickly, with an uncomfortable suspicion that a gay women in a red opera-cloak might come noiselessly into the room, and stand at the foot of her sofa, without her knowledge. She turned her face away, but every time that she did so she was harassed by the remembrance of some detail in the picture which she wanted to verify, and she had to look at it again. She found herself growing exceedingly nervous ; and after one or two vain efforts to scold herself into common sense, she began to feel exceedingly ill-used by Eva's long absence. (N.B. Eva had been away exactly one-quarter of an hour, and was at that very moment trying hard to come back, "lest Helen should want her.") At last she rose from her couch, cautiously and doubtfully, but with more vigour than she gave herself credit for possessing, certainly with more than Eva would have allowed her to exert, and moved across the room to seat herself in a great easy-chair, with

her back to the obnoxious picture, and her face to the pretty conservatory. Having reached this haven of repose, she made a new discovery. Close to her hand was an ornamental wooden bracket, on which stood a little pile of splendidly-illustrated books. They had been removed from the table to make way for the luncheon. Helen took one down, and began to turn the leaves over; she had just energy enough for such an occupation. You might have watched her as she leaned back among the cushions, languidly examining one page after another with a faint smile of admiration, having her feet on a low ottoman, and the volume in her lap, and never moving, except when her tiny white fingers slowly lifted a leaf of the book. But if you had been so watching her, you would have been very much startled. You would have seen her spring upright in her chair, on a sudden, with a look of amazement that was almost horror, her face flushing all over like a cloud at sunset, and her hands, so passive just now, closing fast, almost fiercely, upon the book, as if her life depended upon her grasping it. Her first impulse was to shut the book hurriedly, and glance round with wild eyes and knitted brows, as if in mortal fear that some other eyes had seen what she had seen. Then, perceiving herself to be still alone, she opened it again, looked long and earnestly at the scene, or face, or word—we do not yet know

which it was which had so agitated her—looked with tearful eyes, and varying cheeks, and quivering lips, and at last, with another hasty glance round, but with an expression of indignant decision, she tore the leaf out of the book, folded it up with tremulous hands, and put it into her pocket. It was only the blank leaf before the title-page, so perhaps it would not be missed. But there was an inscription upon it, in a handwriting very familiar to Helen: “Isabel Deane, from Adrian Rivers, July 6th, 18—.”

July the sixth! On that day Helen had been weeping, and longing, and watching, for the post in vain, in the solitary farm-house at Old Walcote; looking forward to the hour of unknown trial, not very far off; dying for some word of love and pity that should strengthen her to bear it when it came; wandering about in spirit, seeking rest, seeking hope, and finding none. And on that day this book had been given, these words had been written—where, and why? Wonder, curiosity, agitation, anger—all these emotions filled her heart so full, that they nearly stifled her. But she did not settle into distrust, much less into despair. Helen was jealous of every other human being in the world who loved her, but she was not jealous of Adrian. Of him she was sure. Reason would have given way under the weight of a real disbelief in his love. She was miserable, ill-used, wronged, deserted; she had a right to

be angry and wretched ; she had an unanswerable claim upon the compassion of everybody ; but through it all she was absolutely certain that he loved her better than he loved anything on earth, and that he would come back to her at last and be forgiven. There was some great mystery, in the toils of which he suffered as much as herself. She was eager to penetrate it. She would have done anything, sacrificed anything or anybody, to do so. Nothing held her back but sheer dread of making some false step in the dark, by which she might lose him irrevocably. His cautions and commands had fastened this fear upon her, and she could not escape from it. Still, she was ready to look through every chink which opened before her, though she dared not open one for herself. It was not, however, a desire to keep that bit of handwriting as evidence which prompted her to tear it out of the book, so much as a feeling that nobody had any right to possess it except herself ; ay, and that the person who had got it, by some unjustifiable means, should not keep it one moment longer. It was an absurd feeling, and if Helen had been happy, she might have laughed at it herself ; as it was, she not only yielded to the impulse, but she said in her secret soul that it was a duty.

She had been so absorbed in her own emotions that she had not noticed a loud ring at the house-bell, and certain unmistakable sounds in

the hall which betokened an arrival. But a shadow falling upon her book through the great window caused her to look up, and she saw a lady, who had apparently stopped in the act of opening the glass shutter, in order to enter from the garden, and who was contemplating Helen with an expression of the most unmitigated astonishment.

The stranger had a carriage-bag in her hand, from which she had taken a small key to undo the outside fastening of the window; she had also an amount of fur and velvet trappings about her, which looked like arrangements for a journey rather than for a walk or a drive. She was a middle-aged woman, tall and lank, with an air of distinction, black hair and eyes, and a bright, resolute, prosperous face—she might be the original of the portrait after some five-and-twenty years. Her surprise did not check her for more than a moment; she opened the glass door and stepped into the room, confronting Helen courteously enough, but decidedly with the air of a person who expected an explanation. A glance at the luncheon-table, instantaneous, but still evidently quite enough to acquaint her with all its arrangements, appeared to increase her surprise, and she stood and waited, slightly bending forward, with a polite question in her face. The question, though it might be surrounded and modified and impeded by all sorts

of small habitual courtesies, was still, very unmistakably, "Who are you?"

Helen wished to tell her, but felt scarcely able. She made a faint demonstration of rising, but dropped back again among the cushions. She felt that she ought not to have been left there to give an unassisted account of herself to this superb stranger; she was a little angry, a little frightened, and very much inclined to cry.

"I beg your pardon, ——?" said the lady, interrogatively, as if Helen had spoken, and she had failed in catching the words.

"I am afraid," murmured Helen, "that you did not expect us—I don't know—I believe—I am very sorry——"

"Pray do not disturb yourself," returned the lady. "I am very happy to see you in my boudoir; I only venture to inquire whom I have the pleasure of receiving?"

"Mrs. Jermyn," said Helen; "that is my name. I have been very ill, and Mr. Wilton was so kind as to drive me here this morning."

"My son," answered the stranger, thus supplying an introduction for herself if it had been needed. "May I ask if he is at home? I have arrived unexpectedly myself, and I am anxious to find him."

"He is showing the garden to my sister," answered Helen, feeling, as she spoke under the fire of Mrs. Wilton's cross-examining eye, that

she was making her case worse every moment, though she did not exactly know how.

“Indeed!” said Mrs. Wilton, seating herself. “I hope we may expect him here soon. Have you been long in this part of the country?”

“Only a few weeks.”

“Some of our scenery is very pretty. Are you within sight of the Burstone hills?”

Helen felt that this was a mode of asking where she lived, and she had not presence of mind enough to decide whether it was desirable to evade the question or not. She answered, on impulse of the moment, “No, I am lodging in Northborough.”

The blank silence which followed implied that Mrs. Wilton was not at all in the habit of “visiting” strangers who came to lodge in Northborough. Slightly she coughed, and looked out of window. “Here is my son,” said she—a piece of news which Helen heard with a mixture of relief and indignation, for she had not the slightest doubt that Mr. Wilton and Eva had used her very ill indeed.

Eva had, as we have seen, made an attempt to return some time ago, but she had been baffled by her companion, who, knowing the geography of the grounds, took good care to lead her further away while he was pretending to comply with her request. He was growing more and more tender in his gallantry every moment, and she was begin-

ning to feel very decidedly uncomfortable, when a breathless messenger from the house overtook them with news that the travelling-carriage had been seen coming down Burstone road, and must be half-way up the avenue by this time. Mrs. Wilton was coming home.

“By Jove! here’s a sell!” was the unfilial exclamation of Mrs. Wilton’s son, on hearing the intelligence; and forgetting Eva for the moment, he began to hurry away to the house by the shortest cut he could find. She followed without attempting to keep pace with him, and he speedily remembered his manners, and turned back to join her.

Eva felt instinctively that something was very much amiss, and asked him no questions; but he broke the silence himself, after a while.

“It’s my mother, you know, and she’ll be struck all of a heap when she finds your sister in her boudoir. I wish we could get back in time, but there isn’t a hope of it.”

“I am sorry,” said Eva, very proudly indeed, “that we should be in Mrs. Wilton’s way. I understood you that we were to have the pleasure of being introduced to her.”

She said it like a queen; and George Wilton, who was the greatest moral coward upon the face of the earth, was on his knees in a moment.

“Of course,” he answered, “of course; but

you see she's been staying at Cranstone, and we didn't expect her back for another week, and I didn't happen to think of writing to her about you (he made a wry face for his own private satisfaction as he said this), and so she knows nothing at all ; and here she comes home all of a sudden, and goes into her own private den, which she keeps so sacred, that I'm hardly let into it with my shoes on, and where nobody has ever had anything stronger than tea and biscuits, within the memory of man ; and there she finds a regular spread, and a young lady asleep on the sofa. Oh ! it's all over with me, I can assure you ; but I don't mind that ; you see, what I mind is that I'm afraid she'll startle your sister."

His manner was so completely that of a caught schoolboy, that Eva could hardly help laughing ; and his anxiety about Helen was so evidently sincere, that she could not be angry with him. They had reached the lawn by this time, and he ran forward to the boudoir window, saying, irreverently, as he did so, "Nothing like taking the bull by the horns, you know." He turned back, however, to whisper, hurriedly, "I say, what's your sister's name ? I know yours."

Some spiteful fairy brought the wrong name to Eva's lips. She was altogether confused, and in the hurry of the moment, she answered, "Mrs. Lennard," instead of Mrs. Jermyn. It

was unlucky. Mr. Wilton did not give her a moment to correct her mistake, but, springing up the steps and into the room, blundered at once into a sort of apologetic introduction.

“Well, mother, how are you? We didn’t expect you till Thursday; delighted to see you, though. I must have the pleasure of introducing these friends of mine at once—Mrs. Lennard, Miss Jermyn—Mrs. Wilton. Mrs. Lennard’s been very ill, I’m sorry to say, and I brought her in here to rest herself.” He gave an awkward look at the debris of the luncheon as he spoke, and inwardly vowed vengeance against the butler for not having had the sense to clear it all away as soon as that fatal carriage was seen coming down Burstone Road.

Mrs. Wilton’s eyes flashed fire as she answered, haughtily and gravely, “I am very happy to make the acquaintance of any friends of yours whom you may think proper to introduce to me; but there is some little mistake, I think; the lady has already introduced herself to me as Mrs. Jermyn.”

“That is my name,” said Helen, with a faint attempt to smile.

“Why the deuce, then——?” began Mr. Wilton, turning upon Eva, and wholly losing his self-possession.

Eva was scarlet.

“There is, as I said, some little mistake,”

pursued Mrs. Wilton, "and I give you the opportunity of correcting it. I am tired with my long drive, and must be excused for declining to entertain your friends."

With a stately inclination of the head she withdrew into her bed-room, leaving a blank silence behind her. Immediately afterwards a very sublime lady's-maid issued from the recesses, and said—

"Mr. George, Mrs. Wilton would be glad to speak to you."

"Tell her I can't come at any price," was the rejoinder.

"What am I to say, sir, if you please?"

"I say I can't come, and you may translate it into poetry, if you like; it's all I shall say," persisted Mr. George.

"We wish to return home at once," said Eva, who had been whispering with Helen.

"There's the trap!" cried Mr. Wilton, who was excessively embarrassed, and had not ceased fidgeting about the room since his mother left it. He had something definite to do now. He made Helen drink some more wine before starting, rather against her will, wrapped her up carefully, lifted her into the carriage, jumped in himself, in spite of urgent entreaties from both the sisters that he would send a servant with them, and return to his mother, gathered up the reins with an air of triumph, and, feeling relieved

and safe for the moment, shouted his parting salutation to the aggrieved maid, who stood in the window, making her whole person into a mute remonstrance against his proceedings.

“ Give my love to my mother, and tell her I’ll be back to dinner.”



CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW TURN.

VERY little conversation took place during the drive to Northborough. There was great discomfort, considerable irritation, and complete misunderstanding amongst the three. The first question was as to the difference of name, about which Eva felt too guilty to say anything at all; but Helen suggested that it was Mr. Wilton's mistake, and as she chose to aver that there was sufficient resemblance in sound between Jermyn and Lennard to account for it, he could only accept the suggestion with no other commentary than that it was "just like his confounded luck." He made a clumsy apology for his mother, saying that she was tired with her journey and taken by surprise, and everybody knew that she was no end of a Turk in temper, though as good a Christian as ever lived, in all other respects; and he was as sorry as he could be that it should have happened, and so on. The sisters were really

too young and inexperienced to feel certain at once that there had been so questionable a character about the proceedings of the morning as to lay them fairly open to Mrs. Wilton's misinterpretation. Helen, in particular, being responsible for the expedition, was determined to think that all was right on their part, and that they had only been unfortunate in encountering a despotic lady in a very bad temper. But Eva, with the recollection of Sydney Lennard's letter vividly present to her, felt scarcely a doubt that they had compromised themselves. She was so much mortified and distressed, and so indignant withal, that she could scarcely keep from tears. Mr. Wilton made a good many small injudicious efforts to appease her at intervals, and grew more and more provoked with his mother for coming home before her time, as he found it impossible to bring a smile to the flushed and troubled face opposite to him. He tried to induce her to take a second lesson in driving ; but she refused point blank. Indeed, she was so obstinately silent that for once Helen had to interpose in her behalf, and try to keep up a little feeble talk without her for the sake of appearances. Perhaps she would hardly have exerted herself to do so had she not been anxious to obtain some information on her own account.

"I was looking at your books while I was resting," said she. "Who is Miss Isabel

Deane, whose name is written in several of them?"

He was delighted at having something to talk about.

"Oh, that's my half-sister," said he, "my mother's daughter by her first marriage. That was her portrait in the red cloak—reckoned a beauty, but not much to my taste, I confess. I don't like 'em as large as life; I like miniatures."

"Does she live at Emberlee?" asked Helen, who wanted to prolong the subject, in order to get as much information as she could.

"When she likes," he replied. "She does just exactly whatever she pleases, and always did. She's more money than you could count if you were at it for years. Old Deane, her father, was a much bigger man than my father. My father made all his money in the iron works, and lots he made, and very much obliged I am to him for it; but old Deane inherited all his from his ancestors, who began somewhere or other in the middle of the Conquest, and have gone on like bricks ever since. Well, you see, old Deane died when Miss Isabel was two years old, and he left everything to his widow (he was the last in the entail, and could do what he liked) if she *didn't* marry again, and everything to his child if she *did*. And she did—precious soon, too—for I'm only four years younger than Isabel. So Isabel's got the family place, and all the money

went on accumulating till she was of age ; and you may fancy what a match she is. Her place is Lauriston, down near Maidenhead, not far from a little village called Fenbury. She's there now. There is some talk of her going to be married ; but I've very little faith in it. She's refused every man in this county dozens of times. She's just the sort of woman to go on refusing right and left till she's five and thirty, and then take fright and snap at a missionary or a music-master, or something of that sort. You just see if she doesn't."

Helen listened, trying all the while to make up her mind to mention Adrian's name, but not finding strength enough for the effort. Eva had caught the word "Fenbury," and it drew her at once out of what Mr. Wilton mentally called "her sulks."

"Do you know Fenbury?" asked she, "near Maidenhead? I have heard that the country is very pretty."

"I dare say," he answered, "I've been there once or twice ; but I didn't take much notice of it. I'm going again this winter. There's an old fellow there—Rivers, of Fenbury Park—who has the best fishing in England, and I hope to get some of it next year. But he's a surly old rascal, and there's no saying. It's his heir they expect Isabel to marry—the estates join ; so it would be uncommonly convenient—and there

was some sort of half-engagement when they were boy and girl, I'm told. But I don't know much about it, and I don't believe more than half. Of course, Captain Adrian Rivers would be glad enough to get her; but she knows her own value pretty well, and I don't think she'll have him. He's a little hard up just now, poor fellow, and that close-fisted old uncle makes some sort of conditions about helping him. He's gone abroad, you know."

"Is he expected in England?" asked Helen, with a self-possession which amazed Eva, and of which she assuredly would not have been capable, if she had not believed both her hearers to be equally in the dark.

"I rather think he is, before long," returned Mr. Wilton. "But why? Do you know him?"

Eva betrayed her secret information to Helen by the extreme quickness with which she interposed to answer this question. "Oh, no;—but the beginning of your story sounded quite romantic, and one feels anxious to know what the end is likely to be."

Eva's little speech brought Mr. Wilton down upon her with all his forces, such as they were. He had to tax her with being romantic herself, to ask her what she meant by the word, to hope that she did not reserve her sympathies exclusively for the unknown Captain Rivers, to assure her that other men might be the heroes

of stories, and might not unnaturally be **very** anxious about their own catastrophes ; in fact, he had to get through a considerable amount of business on his own account, and as he was not very skilful, and Eva did not respond **very** readily, it occupied him and worried her during the remainder of the drive.

When he deposited the sisters at their own door, he took leave of them affectionately, and proposed an appointment for the next day. Eva was so much afraid that Helen might accept it that she grasped her arm tightly, and refused for her. This annoyed Helen a little, and caused her to make her own refusal fainter than she had intended it to be before Eva spoke. A good deal of entreaty and reproach followed on the door-step, and was sternly contemplated by Mrs. Matthews from the shop-window. It all ended in uncertainty, for Eva hurried Helen away, and Mr. Wilton's last words were, "Well, at any rate, I shall call to inquire how you are."

The manner in which Helen bore the fatigue and excitement of this morning was a plain proof that her strength was rapidly returning. It must be understood that the news about Captain Rivers's "half-engagement," which would have been well nigh a fatal blow to her, had there been a germ of suspicion in her own mind that he could purpose any villainy towards her, had made scarcely the slightest impression

in passing. It was a mistake, arising out of the ignorance of the speaker, to which she listened with a slight sense of amusement—a secret ejaculation, “How little they all know!” being her only comment upon it. The point which interested her, and on which all her thoughts fastened, was the possibility of discovering where Adrian was, and what he was doing—of obtaining some key to the mystery of his silence. She could already vaguely conjecture what the explanation might be, and look forward to the end of her trial. Adrian was in debt—she had a general notion that most young men in the army were more or less in debt, and that it did not much signify if they were. He had been obliged to go abroad in order to get away from his creditors. She had another general notion that creditors were a sort of beasts of prey ; that it was the hardest and unkindest thing in the world in them to press their poor debtors for money ; and that it was quite right to escape from them if possible. “Though, no doubt,” said Helen to herself, “they have the law on their side, for the law almost always takes the wrong side.” Then she had discovered that Adrian had a cruel uncle, who was making conditions before he would perform his duty to his nephew. This cruel uncle was the greatest possible comfort to Helen. She thought that she understood it all now. The fiat had gone forth that Adrian was to marry

Miss Isabel Deane, and he had bitterly offended his uncle by refusing to do so. He had been obliged to run away to the Continent in order to avoid imprisonment, and his uncle was intercepting all letters to and from him. She knew a little about the uncle before. She knew that there was some very important reason for keeping the marriage a secret from him, and that the name of Harford had been assumed chiefly in order to mystify him. At least, she had a confused notion to this effect; but the fact was that she did not clearly understand the history of her husband's changes of name.

It was under the name of Harford that she had lived with him, and under that name she at first corresponded with him after their separation. She directed her letters, by his orders, to Captain Harford, sometimes at the Fenbury post-office, sometimes at other places. But suddenly there had come a change. A hurried note, evidently written in great agitation, had commanded her to abandon the name of Harford, and not, under any circumstances, to use it again. In this note Adrian desired her to change her quarters without a moment's delay; he told her that the sole possibility of their reunion which existed, depended on her exact compliance with his present directions. She was to move at once to Gloucester, and inquire at the post-office for a letter for Mrs. Jermyn, by which name she was to be called in future.

But as it was of the highest importance for the present to conceal every trace of their connection with each other, he told her that he would assume a different name. It was on this occasion that he gave his address as Lewis Lennard, and he desired her at first to write to him at the Maidenhead post-office instead of at Fenbury. But he charged her at the same time, in the most earnest manner, to write as seldom as possible, and not to disturb herself if she heard very seldom from him. Poor Helen did her best to comply with these mysterious and unpalatable regulations. She told Eva that the name of Harford must be abandoned, and that they must move at once into lodgings in Gloucester. Eva complied, though not without a very strenuous expression of her disgust at her unknown brother-in-law's proceedings, which nearly led to a quarrel between the sisters. When, however, she found, as we have seen, that the Hendersons were on her traces, she was ready enough to make a second flitting, and to change her name as many times as there were days in the year if necessary.

A little while after they arrived at Old Walcote farm, Helen received her last letter from him whom she called her husband. It gave her a new address, at Elbury, the jeweller's, in — Street, Cavendish Square, but desired her only to use it in case of actual necessity, and it enclosed a large remittance of money. Helen wrote to this address

but received no answer ; we have seen that after a time her patience gave way, and that she wrote again to the old address at Fenbury, which she had been desired not to use, and we have seen how the experiment failed. Whether she actually knew that Rivers was the real name disguised under all these aliases—whether she had only guessed it—or whether she first sprang to the conclusion when she recognized Adrian's handwriting in Isabel Deane's book—signifies very little. It is enough to say that she entertained not a moment's doubt as to the identity of the giver of that book with the Adrian Harford to whom she had pledged her faith ; and that having, as she believed, now obtained a clue to his past and present position, she was absorbed in considering what might be the best means of following it out, and whether she dared follow it out at all. So completely was she absorbed that she forgot to address the slightest reproach to Eva for any of her small misdemeanours of the morning, and cut short all representations of the propriety of dropping Mr. Wilton's acquaintance by saying, vehemently, "I'm not going to give it up to oblige Mr. Lennard or anybody. You don't know how important it is to me. There, there, Eva, I'm too tired to talk now, but to-morrow I'll tell you a great deal."

It may be imagined with what impatience Eva waited for the morrow. The way was clearly

open for just such a conversation as Sydney Lennard had desired her to encourage, and she consulted his letter again and again that she might be sure of all her points. In the interval she watched Helen with anxious tenderness, and was comforted by seeing that the occurrences of the day did not seem to have done her any injury. She made up for her unusual exertion in the most satisfactory manner possible, by taking an unusual amount of sleep. Nearly all the afternoon she slept quietly, only waking to take nourishment and speak a few words in a cheerier manner than had been hers for a long time. There was hope in her heart again. Little enough did there seem for Hope to rest upon, but in a heart of nineteen she is able to stand as nearly as possible upon nothing.

The next morning began well; Helen had slept soundly, and she ate her breakfast with more appetite than usual. When her invalid toilette was completed, and she was lying on the sofa, looking very lovely in her white wrapper and lace cap, Eva came and seated herself, not beside her, but on the edge of the couch itself, half turning, and bending a little backwards, so as to look down into the fair face on the pillow, and taking both the small fragile hands in her own—

“Now,” said she, “are you able to talk? You said you would be able to tell me a great deal.”

“I want to know, first,” said Helen, “how

you found out that he had anything to do with Fenbury."

Eva trembled lest she should tell too much in her answer. "It was in this way," she replied, after a moment's hesitation :—"When you were so horribly ill, darling, and were longing so for letters, you often said the name ; you asked, again and again, 'Is there no letter from Fenbury Park?' Well—I don't want to say very much about it lest you should be agitated ; at last, when no letter came, and I was so very miserable, and I did not know what to do, I thought that I would try writing to Fenbury Park."

"You did!" cried Helen, interrupting her, and becoming crimson with emotion; "why—why did you never tell me?"

"Because no good came of it, and I thought it would only distress you to know that I had tried."

"What happened?" asked Helen, "tell me quick what happened?"

"My letter was returned to me by Mr. Rivers, of Fenbury Park, with a very cold little note, to say that no such person was known there, and that any future letters to the same address would be destroyed unread."

"No such person as, as, what name did you use?"

"I used the name which I thought was the real name," answered Eva, in a low, frightened voice ; "the name which you said we were never to use after you began to call yourself Mrs. Jermyn."

She saw that Helen still waited impatiently ; and, though she felt a strange cowardly shrinking from the actual sound of the syllables, as though they were something to conjure with, and might bring immediate mischief upon her head, she felt herself compelled to add them, in a still lower tone of voice—" the name of Harford."

Helen breathed freely. She, too, was childishly afraid of the first sound, so long forbidden, and wanted to hear it from other lips than her own. She was silent a little while, recovering her composure. Then she said, " I don't wonder at you, Eva dear, for I suppose you thought I was dying," (and she put up her hands to Eva's bending face with a pitying caress, as she remembered what a time of anguish that solitary child had passed by her bed-side,) " but never—never again do anything about me without asking me first. It is all a great mystery and a great puzzle, but it is sure to come right in the end. I understand more than I did, and I see that we may do the greatest possible mischief without meaning it, unless we keep exactly to what he told me."

Eva answered only by kissing the hands which touched her cheeks, and Helen added peevishly, " You *won't* say you trust him ! "

" Oh ! dearest, you know I never saw him, and the only thing I know about him is that he has made you miserable."

" But he made me happy first," said Helen,

"and you might at least trust *me* when you *can* know nothing about it yourself."

"So I will, so I do," answered Eva, eagerly, fearing nothing so much as that her opposition might cause distress, and bring on either a fit of hysterics or a feverish attack.

"That's right," said Helen, taking the words for more than they meant, and immediately changing the subject, with a half conscious fear that they might be explained away. "How did you find out where Fenbury Park was?"

"I went to the library and looked at a county map for the gentlemen's seats, and then I got a post-office directory, and found out about the post-town."

"You clever little thing!" cried Helen, half amused; "I never should have thought of doing all that."

"Yes; wasn't I clever?" said Eva, glad to fall into her tone; "I was so proud of myself when I found out that I had succeeded. I didn't write at first, because I had determined to be very cautious and patient, and not to try that chance till the other had quite failed; but at last, when there seemed no chance of hearing through the London address, I sent my letter."

She carefully abstained from mentioning Sydney Lennard; and Helen, whose resistance to his suggestions had been mainly an emotion of temper, and who had not as yet hardened herself

into any systematic opposition, never once thought about him.

"Well," said Helen, "you know more than I thought. Now, I shall tell you a little more still, because we ought to be working together, and it is so dreadful having to keep it all quite to myself; but you must be sure—sure—sure to keep my secret always from everybody. If you don't, you will break my heart, and I shall never be able to trust you again in anything. It is that Mr. Rivers, of Fenbury Park, who keeps us asunder, and who keeps back all our letters to each other. He is a wicked, cruel man, and he has the power in his hands, and makes the worst possible use of it! I have found it all out now. Everything is his fault, and not Adrian's."

I said before, that whenever a woman is in difficulties, she looks for some one to trust; others have noticed that she also wants to find some one whom she can condemn utterly, and charge unreservedly with all the blame of the trouble under which she suffers; but this is not because she likes to condemn, it is because she longs to acquit. By making one victim, laying everything upon his shoulders, driving him out into the wilderness, and forgetting him, she is able to absolve all other persons concerned; and sometimes—often—her special anxiety is to absolve the guiltiest. Eva had no wish to defend Mr. Rivers, and so she gave him up at once to Helen's

wrath, and the two agreed to look upon him as the evil genius of their lives; but when they had passed their verdict upon him, Eva had still a question to ask.

“If all these letters are kept back,” said she, “how is it possible that Adrian can bear it? He knows no more about your state than you do about his; but he knows where you are, and he knows what you were expecting when he left you; why—why does he not come to you?”

“I cannot tell,” answered Helen, bursting into tears. She wept so bitterly that Eva could think of nothing but the effort to soothe and comfort her. As soon, however, as she could speak through her sobs, she said, “I know he is obliged to be out of England; he is longing to come; he will come as soon as he possibly can. Oh! Eva, don’t you think so? Don’t you think he’ll come to me? He could never forget me and forsake me; he loves me so dearly, so fondly, better than all the world—better than a wife ever was loved by a husband before—just as I love him, or more, if possible. I won’t doubt him; I don’t doubt him; if I did, I should be the most ungrateful creature living, and he could never forgive me. When he comes, I shall be able to tell him that I never doubted him for a moment, though you were always talking against him, and breaking my heart by trying to make me think

myself deserted. Oh, Eva, Eva ! I know you didn't mean to be cruel ; but it is so cruel."

"No, no, no !" cried Eva, clinging to her ; "indeed, darling Helen, I'm quite ready to trust him too. I'll never say another word against him to you as long as I live."

When they had a little recovered from their agitation, Helen went on, "And now, Eva, you understand why I am so determined not to drop Mr. Wilton's acquaintance ; I shall surely be able to find out from him, in time, where Adrian is, and if I only know where he is, Eva—if I only know where he is—I can bear anything, and everything will come right."

"I suppose," said Eva, "if you could find out where he is, you would venture to write to him direct?"

"Yes—oh, yes ! or," added Helen, in a very low voice, and drawing Eva's face down to her own, "or go to him ! Oh, if I were only once with him, if I could see his face once, once more ; and if he could have baby and me with him ! I know so well he would never let us leave him again."

"But, darling," said Eva, "how *can* we manage it ? If this Mrs. Wilton does not choose to call upon us, how *can* we go on being intimate with her son ?"

"There, don't spoil it all with your cold notions of prudence and propriety," cried Helen.

"as if an etiquette signified when one's whole life is at stake ! You wouldn't keep me from the only means I have of saving myself from despair —I'm sure you wouldn't."

"No, I'm *sure* I wouldn't," answered poor Eva.

"Then we won't talk any more about *that* part of the matter," pursued Helen. "If a thing is to be done it is useless to consider the objections to it."

Eva yielded. Heaven knows she knew little enough and cared less about the etiquette of the matter. But her girlish pride and modesty had been thoroughly alarmed, and her instinct was strong in asserting that after their encounter with the mother they had no business to continue their acquaintance with the son. She felt, however, that it would be mere selfishness if she were to refuse to do this violence to herself for the sake of Helen's happiness. After a moment's pause, she said, suddenly—

"Nellie, where were you married?"

"I have told you," said Helen. "First in Scotland, and afterwards in England."

"But was it all right; are you quite sure it was all right?"

"You tiresome child, what can you possibly mean? Of course it was all right, I told you so before."

"Do you mind telling me the names of the places?"

"I promised never to tell them to anybody," answered Helen, "and there can be no reason in the world why I should. You know, Eva dear, it's a matter which you can't possibly understand."

"I suppose," said Eva, "if that wicked Mr. Rivers were to say you were not married, you could prove that you were?"

"Prove it!" exclaimed Helen, almost laughing, "why, here's baby for a proof. Of course, dear, there are the proofs, but I don't in the least care about them. Adrian knows it all."

Nothing further was to be elicited from Helen. Eva was just considering with herself whether it would be well to tell her that Sydney Lennard was engaged in the pursuit of Adrian, whether it might be possible to induce her to co-operate with him, or to accept his aid, when Ann came into the room with the announcement that Mr. Wilton was in the parlour. Helen instantly became very much excited.

"Ah!" she cried, "we must not lose this opportunity. Go down to him, Eva dear; I will follow, if I can, as soon as possible. Try to get him into conversation. I think you might very well manage to ask the question for me. But at any rate you can make an appointment."

There was no course for Eva except compliance. As she went reluctantly downstairs—her cheeks burning with the thought that she was about to do an unbecoming action, and to

undergo what she looked upon as a humiliation—the maid stopped her—

“Missus wants to speak to you first,” said she. “Here, if you please. She’s in *such a* way.”

“What is the matter?” asked Eva.

“Oh, she’s been going on all the morning, and she says never was such doings, and she can’t bear it, and she won’t bear it. You’d better stand up to her, Miss, for it ain’t no use making a soft answer to a real bully.”

Eva stood bewildered. And at that moment, Mrs. Matthews opened the door of her own private parlour, and appeared on the threshold with an air of boundless respectability.

“You will please to step in here for a moment, Miss Jermyn,” said she; “I have just one word to say and no more, and then you can go to entertain your visitor.”

Eva obeyed the summons, and “stepped in” as she was desired. Before she stepped out again, the whole course of her intentions was changed, though she had not remained in that parlour of judgment more than five minutes.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HENDERSONS.

IF Sydney Lennard had happened to mention the Hendersons in his own family, he would have heard all about their plans long ago. But he shrank from brushing unnecessarily against the outermost skirts of his mystery, and so he remained in ignorance. Two days after his return from Fenbury, however, the matter was revealed to him by chance.

“Do you know, Syd, that we are all engaged to the Hendersons on Thursday?” asked Jessy.

“No, I never heard a word about it. I thought they were out of town.”

“They have only been away for a fortnight, paying a visit somewhere. Now they are come back on purpose to give their autumn party before they go down to Brighton. The invitations were out long ago.”

“And mamma accepted?”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Lennard. “They would be annoyed if we did not accept. You and

I dine, and the girls go in the evening. I forgot to tell you, but of course you have made no other engagement."

"Why of course?" said Sydney, half-laughing.

"Because you have mentioned none."

"I think it looks rather as if I was in the habit of waiting to hear whether I am engaged, without knowing it, than of presuming to make any engagements for myself."

"Don't be silly, Syd," said his mother, who was rather in a hurry. "You knew quite well it was the Hendersons' time, and I am sure you would not have made any un-breakable engagement without asking me."

"Quite true," said Sydney. "There is only one thing in the world which I should prefer to your accepting my invitations in my name without referring to me."

"And what is that, pray?"

"If you would only be kind enough to refuse them in the same manner!"

"That's nonsense, you know," said Mrs. Lennard. "You may think it a great plague to have to dress and go out when you want to rest yourself at home, but you would think it much worse to have no society at all, and it would be extremely bad for you in every way. Just see what bears people become who encourage themselves in a taste for seclusion. You may depend upon it, it is quite as great a danger as a taste

for dissipation, and does quite as much mischief. And there is a sort of pretence of being above one's neighbours about it, which always provokes me, when I know that the real secret of it is generally mere inertness and awkwardness of mind or body—not superiority of any kind."

"In my case," said Sydney, "it is simply inertness of body—please don't give it any grander name! The truth is, I come home tired, and feel inclined to be lazy."

"You are at least ten years too young to be allowed to make such an excuse," returned his mother. "I'll tell you another reason why I am always out of patience when men make a great merit of liking their own fireside, and charge the women of their family with a taste for dissipation, because they like a little society. Just go and look at the fireside party, and what will you see? The husband dozing or reading the newspaper in his easy-chair, and the wife stitching away for her life. *She* never gets any play except when there is company; so no wonder she likes it, poor thing. And as to retirement being such a fine thing for the mind, I don't believe a word of it. What do you suppose fellow-creatures were made for?"

"To be let alone," answered the provoking Sydney.

"How can you allow yourself to talk such nonsense before your sisters!" exclaimed Mrs. Lennard. "Just imagine what sort of world it

would be if everybody had exactly your opinions, and carried them out to their full extent. Where should we all be in the end if we all acted upon the principle of letting each other alone?"

"Just exactly where we were at the beginning—shouldn't we?" asked Sydney, meekly, and putting up his hand as if to deprecate an expected box on the ear. "But don't look so grave about it, mother dear, for I really am only talking nonsense, because I like to make you you preach a little. And I intend to wear my new waistcoat at Mrs. Henderson's, and to have my hair curled with tongs, and to endure my tightest boots without flinching—all to please you; so you musn't scold me!" He had caught the hand which was raised in mock anger to chastise him, and was giving it a kiss while he spoke. Mrs. Lennard's wrath subsided into laughter.

"You boys have it all your own way with me," said she; "but I never could and never shall understand what pleasure you find in pretending to hold opinions which you don't really hold, for the sake of opposition. Now don't defend yourself, for you know you are constantly doing it. I think it is very confusing for your sisters, who naturally look to you for guidance, and who can never tell whether you are in joke or in earnest. And I don't think it's a good habit for yourself. I quite expect that you will come

at last not to know what you think about anything?"

Sydney protested against what he called this horrible and chaotic end to his career, but Mrs. Lennard only emphasized her prophecy by adding a vigorous "Well, I do. For it seems to be quite what you are looking to!" as she left the room.

Sydney remained, smiling to himself, but not the least in ridicule. It was quite true that he loved to make his mother preach. And he was sometimes guilty of exaggerating or distorting his real opinions for the sake of putting her completely in the right, when she began by being a little on one side of it. He would not have beaten her in an argument for the world. So he never said a word in response to her favourite and triumphant question, "What would become of us if everybody thought exactly as you do, and followed out their opinions to the utmost?" though in reality it appeared to him to be the weakest of all the weapons which she flourished over his head; for he thought that it was precisely the certainty that tastes would always differ, and that all the world would *not* fix on his favourite colour which entitled him to choose it for himself, and to abide by it. And he thought, moreover, that the conception of a Utopia involved in this argument (which is a pet with others besides Mrs. Lennard), the conception, that is, of a state in which all persons would

do and think exactly the same upon all subjects, was uncomfortably monotonous, not to say dull.

Mrs. Lennard went away to superintend certain indispensable arrangements about her own and her daughters' costume previous to the Hendersons' autumn party. The ladies of Sydney's family were just in a position to require a little personal exertion on all festive occasions, if they were to produce a thoroughly satisfactory effect, and as they had good taste, no affectation, and plenty of energy, they did not shrink from it in the least. As for giving up a pleasure because they were not able to approach it with as much state and deliberation as if they had five thousand a year; this was an alternative which never occurred to them. They were quite capable of walking a mile to a ball, when they were in the country, and, after unpacking themselves at the end of their journey, of appearing in the drawing-room as fresh, as neat, and as elegant as if they had just stepped out of a carriage warranted to accommodate any amount of crinoline. But it is not to be denied that this result was attained by a considerable expenditure of time, thought, and trouble. The attentions of the girls were just now directed more to their mother's appearance than to their own, and there was one point upon which they were a little anxious, not to say nervous. This point was—the length of her skirts. They were in the habit of saying fearlessly, "No

one looks so well as mamma when she is nicely dressed," and of adding, with a little tremor, "and when her dress is long enough." Mrs. Lennard was so brisk, so active, so useful in all her ways and habits, that her tendency to wear her petticoats a little shorter than the fashionable standard, was almost invincible; and she was so exceedingly pugnacious on the subject, that her family did not know how to approach it without doing more harm than good. In fact her daughters were afraid that if they agitated it imprudently, the only result would be that she would insist upon shortening *their* skirts. They had given the matter up in daily life, but they said that they "could not bear to see her come in at a party looking unlike other people. And yet *what* was to be done? for *really* she had quite persuaded herself that everybody else's petticoats were too long, and she did say *such things* about trailing in the dust and sweeping the floors, and getting under other people's feet, which *never by any chance* happened, that it was quite uncomfortable. And it was so vexatious to see her nice handsome new silk looking as if it had been made for somebody else." Yet they knew if they said much about it she would only insist upon having *their* dresses measured, and comparing the lengths with their known heights, and finding out that they were much too long. So they had laid a little plot with Sydney long ago to

provide her with a new and preternaturally handsome silk dress for the next great occasion. Sydney was to pay for it, and they were to have it made up as a surprise. Sydney was quite willing to bear his share in the scheme, only charging them to remember when they selected the silk, that "*nothing* could be too good. But," he added, "I'll not be responsible for anything at all about the making up, except the bill. I know nothing about it, and I tell you fairly I'm frightened at it." And he was so much frightened at it that he took care to keep out of the way when the grand occasion approached. He accomplished this cowardly manœuvre by coming home only just in time to dress for the dinner-party, so that he did not see his mother till he handed her into the carriage; and as the Hendersons lived only two streets off, he knew that he should be at their door by the time that the indispensable thanking and scolding for his present were over, and before any supplementary grievance connected with it had been arrived at.

The Hendersons were a great deal richer than the Lennards, but as they desired to make a great deal more show in the world, they were practically very much upon a level with their poorer friends, with regard to labour and economy. In fact, their life was the harder of the two, for it may be described as a continuous effort to do a little more than was quite possible,

and yet to keep out of debt. The career of Mrs. Henderson consisted of one unbroken course of bargains. The amount of her success varied, but the efforts were never intermitted, and she had no time to rejoice over a triumph, or to be depressed by a defeat, because the occasion for one bargain came so closely at the heels of another, that you could scarcely draw your breath between them. Her progress was like the progress of a crochet-hook, which is always forcing its way through one loop in order to get hold of another, always catching, and grasping, and pulling, and poking, and wriggling, and yet never making anything better than imitation lace after all. She was, however, a moderately pleasant woman in society. She did not parade her machinery; and when her working hours were over she was capable of enjoying some of their results. A certain sharpness of feature and voice, and a remarkable vigilance of eye, made you occasionally a little uncomfortable in her presence. She had the ill-bred habit of covertly inspecting all her friends from head to foot, as soon as they came into the room, and those who underwent the operation could not help feeling that they were not only examined, but that they were priced, in all particulars; and if any article in your dress or your drawing-room specially took her fancy, you felt that it was a more than common victory of principle over inclination which withheld her from stealing

it. Mr. Henderson was a man of gentlemanly address, and though his temper was irritable, he was far more genial than his wife. He entirely approved of all her proceedings, and would have been roused to action in an instant had she failed either in making a great show for her money, or spending as little money as possible on her show. But he habitually trusted the executive department to her, and, therefore, not being familiarized with the details of his own daily economies, he really did not know how mean he was. On festive occasions, when he contemplated his china and his plate, when he saw his champagne circle round the table, or noted, with well-pleased eyes, the judicious splendour of dress exhibited by his wife and his daughter, he unaffectedly believed himself to be a generous man. His charities were decent and conspicuous, and they entirely satisfied his conscience. With self-denial, for the sake of appearances, he was familiar; of self-denial for the sake of a Cause, a Thought, or an Affection, he knew nothing. But he is not the only man in the world who believes that he is not stingy because he is willing to spend large sums on his own comfort, dignity, and reputation.

Mr. James Henderson, *file*, was a steady man of business, singularly dull and uninteresting, but quite irreproachable. He was the kind of person whom chaperons call "worthy," and girls avoid,

unless they are plainly set upon matrimony. Without possessing a single bad quality, he had every conceivable social disadvantage, and for some of these it was impossible not to blame him. He could not of course help being short, stout, and pallid, but he need not have been dapper ; there was indeed something in the fact of his being stout which ought to have precluded his being dapper—yet dapper he was. He might have worn clothes which fitted him with less obtrusive precision, he might have committed to memory rather a larger number of sentences about the opera, the weather, the most popular preacher, the most popular novel, and the most popular general subject, so that he would not have been obliged to begin again so very soon ; and lastly, when he knew that he had nothing to say, he might have abstained from crossing the room in order to sit beside some hapless girl and prevent anybody else from talking to her. Miss Henderson was a good-looking, clever, fast young lady of eight-and-twenty, who intended to marry Sydney Lennard. There is one characteristic of the whole family which we have not yet named. They were all snappish. Mr. James was the least so, because he was stupid, and it is not easy to be snappish and stupid at the same time. However, he combined the two qualities as well as he could, and appeared to improve in both as he grew older.

Miss Henderson was busily engaged in making decorations for the dinner-table. She had a talent for the construction of strictly conventional flowers, stars, and gems, and she saved a great deal of money by exercising it whenever her parents gave a party. But she was not pleased just now, for when she opened the reservoir in which her works were kept, she discovered that the stock was smaller and shabbier than she had supposed, and she had consequently more to do than she had reckoned upon, for the present occasion. As her day had been carefully mapped out, she felt that the additional half hour given to dressing the dinner-table must be taken from dressing herself, and she did not like it. "I shall never have time for those plaits," she said, to herself, in a provoked voice, "for of course mamma will keep Parker to the last moment, and yet they become me more than anything."

"Louisa," said her brother, entering the room, "I don't think the lights are safe."

"Don't you?" rejoined she, briefly, without asking an explanation, or looking up from her work.

"No, indeed, I don't. The screen which is to shut off the refreshments—that fluted calico thing, you know, which the men are putting up for the evening—has been stuck so very close that I think everything will have to be moved at that side of the room."

She was quite silent, and tried to show by her manner, that she was not in the slightest degree interested.

“Louisa, do you hear me?”

“I am not in the least deaf.”

“Then why don’t you say something?”

“How you do go on boring!” replied Louisa, And she appeared to consider this a sufficient reply, for she took no further notice.

“It is of very little consequence to me,” said her brother, “for I don’t wear thin muslin and crinoline; but you do.”

No answer.

“And you are always so excessively anxious that our parties should be what you call successful. Now I should like to know what kind of success is to be expected from a party at which there is a real alarm of fire. I should like to know *that*. If that is the kind of success you choose to—to—to—arrange for our parties, Louisa, all I can say is, that I wish to have nothing to [do with it. I wash my hands of it entirely.”

Still no answer.

“Very well, Louisa. Then I shall leave it just as it is. And very likely you will get burned while you are eating ices, and have great scars all over the back of your neck, like Miss Hobbs. It’s not my business. You are responsible for the whole thing.”

"I do wish you would be quiet just for one minute," said Louisa; "it is quite impossible for me to shape my leaves properly while you keep confusing me all the while. Of course I know I shall have to go up and look at it. It's very hard that you never can manage anything by yourself. I have more to do than I can possibly squeeze into the time, and you really might have the sense to give an order about a screen, without bringing me all the way up-stairs to see whether it's right."

She went up-stairs like a whirlwind, and Mr. James following her at a slower pace, observed that if he had settled it by himself, most likely it would have been all wrong.

"Most likely it *would*," said she.

"I mean most likely you would have thought so, which does not in the least imply that it would really have been wrong. But it is so disagreeable to be perpetually found fault with, that I always choose to take precautions."

"What nonsense!" interrupted Louisa; "this is perfectly safe. Why, there's nothing near it but lamps, and they're half-a-foot off."

"They may be, now you have moved them," said Mr. James.

"I didn't move them half-an-inch. The idea of making me take all this trouble about nothing! Oh, Langton (this was to a superintending man-servant), this will do very nicely. And

please stay and see it finished yourself, for Mr. James doesn't understand it, and I can't be running up and down stairs fifty times in a minute."

On her way down she encountered her father. "Louisa," said he, "that dessert ought to have been finished an hour ago, and there it is littering all over the dining-room."

"It *would* have been finished an hour ago," said Louisa, "if James hadn't been worrying me."

"Now, Louisa," cried the unexpected James, bouncing in from the hall, where the accusation smote upon his ear as he passed, "how *can* you say so? I did not keep you five minutes."

"Well, pray don't let us have any sparring," said Mr. Henderson. "If it had been begun in proper time it would have been finished now, but women always drive things off to the very last moment. If there is one thing that I hate more than another, it is hurry. And, James, do pray let your sister alone when she is busy."

"I assure you——," began James.

"I don't wish to hear any words about it," said his father. "Louisa is wrong, but that is no reason why you are to harass her and keep her from doing her work."

Both the offenders were mute and sulky, but Mr. Henderson's triumph did not last long, for Mrs. Henderson came in just at that moment.

"My dear," cried she, "what in the world brings you home two hours before your time; worrying and getting in everybody's way, when we have more to do than we can manage. Here's Langton tells me you've been ordering luncheon in the back drawing-room, and it's impossible."

"I thought I should be in the way in the dining-room," said Mr. Henderson. It was not often that he was so meek, but his wife had him at an advantage to-day, as he knew that she had been toiling at home while he was enjoying the comparative repose of his daily business.

"You can't help being in the way everywhere," rejoined Mrs. Henderson, "and if you must have your luncheon at this unheard-of hour, you had much better go and get it at a pastry-cook's, for you can't have it here."

Thus ignominiously subdued, Mr. Henderson withdrew, muttering something about being turned out of his own house.



CHAPTER XIX.

A DESPERATE CASE.

SYDNEY resigned himself to the natural course of a party during the first hours of the evening, not doubting that before all was over he should contrive to secure a few minutes' private conversation with Mr. Henderson. He preferred this mode of approaching his subject to one more delicate and formal. It would have been inconvenient to so busy a man as himself to make arrangements for a regular interview with so busy a man as Mr. Henderson. Besides, in his uncertainty as to the course which the interview was likely to take, and as to the amount of information which he ought to communicate, he was glad to feel his way beforehand, under circumstances which rendered it impossible that he should be brought to bay, and compelled to give a full and particular account of himself. So he behaved himself in all respects like a guest without a burden on his mind. He was taken down to

dinner by Miss Henderson, and he did his duty like a man in talking to her. If she had known how little he missed her plaits, the burden upon *her* mind would have been lighter. But she was oppressed all dinner-time by a secret conviction that her coiffure was not so becoming as it might have been, and her efforts to please were therefore marred by the fatal and unpardonable blot of restlessness.

Mrs. Lennard and Mr. Henderson were great allies. She had been a very pretty woman, and he was the sort of middle-aged man whose manner towards women of his own standing always suggested the idea that there is a seething sea of compliments under a thin crust, ready to break through at the slightest tap. Mrs. Lennard made a joke of it, but rather liked it in her heart. She knew when she was looking well; and it was pleasant to be made to feel that others knew it too. She was a popular person in her circle of acquaintance. Entire absence of affectation, of shyness, and of pretence, plenty to say, a cheery laugh, a bright look, and an indescribable expression of downright honesty and substantial kindness, made her a very genial element in the social compound at all times. There was, besides, a sort of quaint touchiness about her that was irresistible; everybody was a little amused at her; everybody knew that it was not safe to encounter her on certain sub-

jects ; and the pleasure of seeing a stranger tread unawares upon the tender ground, and suffer for it, was very great. No real harm ever came of it, because there was much goodness and kindness under her little irritabilities, and though she certainly did pass strong sentences, and take vigorous dislikes, she was too hearty to be really bitter. She drew her line with an unflinching hand ; and so long as the people whom she condemned did not try to pass it, her very condemnation was good-humoured. To take good care of her daughters, and to induce her sons to take good care of themselves, she held to be her first duty in life ; and if any questionable persons or objectionable habits should attempt to invade the sacred precincts of her home, they would assuredly have encountered a dragon in the path ; but so long as they kept their distance she was content to abuse them with a sort of humorous vehemence which had no mischief in it. To "set Mrs. Lennard going" was, therefore, a favourite practice among her friends ; and Mrs. Lennard recognized and responded to the attempts to set her going without any resentment, and declaimed the little harangues which were expected from her, with the most encouraging alacrity.

"How nice she looks !" was Sydney's whisper to Jessy, when the sisters made their appearance among the earliest comers to the evening party.

"Yes, but she was very much put out about the dress."

"I'm glad I wasn't there, then."

"I know you are, you mean wretch," answered Jessy, in the same suppressed tone; "but it would have been so much better if you *had* been there; because, you know, *we* had no sort of merit about the dress, and therefore she made no sort of allowance for us."

"What shall I do to make up for it? Shall I go and tell her that she looks better than anybody else in the room, and that it is all owing to the way in which her dress is made?"

"If you were to do that," said Jessy, "I would never call you a coward again."

"What a remarkable promise!" said James Henderson, joining the group.

"Yes, isn't it a remarkable promise?"

"It is indeed."

The conversation began to flag. It generally flagged from the first moment when James Henderson was one of the talkers. As he did not know what to say next, he looked at Jessy and laughed; and as she did not like him, she smiled a little smile of polite inquiry in return, as much as to say, "What are you laughing at?" Whereupon he thought it best to change the subject, and asked, mildly, "Were you caught in the rain to-day?"

"No, I wasn't out."

"But you generally do go out, don't you? I thought you generally went out every day, unless, of course, it rained."

"Oh, yes! we walk early before breakfast, till the winter is quite set in."

"I have heard about that. I have heard about your walks before breakfast; and, do you know, I do admire you so very much for them. I think it the most strong-minded thing in the world to—to—get up, you know, in that sort of way, when there isn't any reason for it, and you're not obliged. And I think you must come home with such an appetite."

There was a little pause; after which he said, in an insinuating voice, "Don't you find, now, that you come home with an appetite?"

He admired Jessy Lennard very much, and at this moment he rather hoped that he was flirting with her.

"Yes," she replied, gravely, "I generally eat two great basins full of bread and milk, and a hundred shrimps with the heads on."

"No, but do you really though?" he replied, much too quickly to have fairly mastered the meaning of her sentence. After another short pause, he added, "Oh! but of course I see you are joking."

Jessy was sorely tempted to pursue the subject; but, as she said afterwards to Emily, "You can't make game of a man in his own

house," so she abstained; and feeling penitent for the little indulgence which she had conceded to her inclinations already, she generously determined to help him to talk.

"What has become," asked she, "of that very pretty girl who came out at your ball, last year; or was it the year before last? I fancied that she was always with you."

"Do you mean Helen Lake? She does not live with us now."

"Does she not? What a pity! I remember now, it was two years ago; and I wanted so much to see her again; but Miss Henderson told me she was away for a visit."

"Yes, she went away. She was to have lived with us—regularly, you know—but there has been another arrangement."

Sydney listened eagerly to this little dialogue, in the hope that he might gather from it some idea of the way in which the present position of Helen and Eva was viewed by the Hendersons, before he approached the head of the house. "At any rate," thought he, "they are putting the best colour upon it that is possible under the circumstances. I suppose they mean to keep the secret as long as they can. I wonder whether Jessy will ask any questions about Eva."

But Jessy did not know of Eva's existence. There was no real intimacy between the Hendersons and the Lennards; in fact, it may be doubted

whether the Hendersons had any intimate friends. They gave a regular series of formal parties, and did their duty strictly in the matter of morning visits; but they would have resented a call at unseasonable hours as a liberty, and it would not have suited their manner of living to have any friends on such terms with them as to drop in unexpectedly, and remain to dinner. They paid for their state entertainments by living as plainly and cheaply as they could in the intervals, and they did not like to be seen in their intermediate state of plainness and cheapness. These two families, therefore, meeting only on ceremonious occasions, might know each other for half a century, conversing familiarly whenever they met, and yet remaining in profound ignorance of each other's domestic habits and private concerns. It was the custom of the Hendersons to leave London during the late summer months, which they usually passed in a series of visits, and to return for a short time before they took their winter trip to the sea-side. During this interval of return they gave what they called their "autumn party"—a *soirée musicale*, preceded by a big dinner; and because it was not given in the season, they looked upon it as a very free and easy sort of business, and they gathered up at it all their scraps of acquaintanceship, and admitted persons whom they would not have liked to exhibit at their grander *réunions* in the spring. It was a

permanent fiction in the Henderson family that Mr. Henderson was overworked, and he made this his excuse for getting as much amusement as was compatible with his success in business ; and as he was born a prosperous man, he contrived to do this very comfortably, and without any pernicious effects.

Helen Lake had made a great sensation at the Hendersons' parties, two years ago. But it so happened that the time of Bertie Lennard's gravest misdemeanour coincided with the time of Helen's *début*, and the Lennard family had been very much out of spirits, and had withdrawn from society as much as they could. For part of this time Mrs. Lennard had been really unwell, and this had afforded them an excuse for refusing invitations. So it chanced that Helen had only been seen by them once, on the occasion of her coming-out ball ; and Sydney, who was not a dancing man, and had shirked the said ball altogether, had never seen her at all. He tried to recollect anything that he had ever heard about her, or about Eva, but in vain. His intimacy with the Hendersons had been even less than that of his mother and sisters. He did not like them, and he had always avoided them. It was only in the last year that it had occurred to Louisa that it might be a good plan to marry him. She was beginning to feel a little uneasy about herself, and she had gone through rather an awkward

affair of a broken engagement ; and he was so decidedly looked upon as a rising man, that she turned her thoughts to him with considerable spirit and persistency. The plan which she had devised for carrying out her newly-formed notion was to select for the sea-side trip of her family the same place selected by the Lennards ; and as her family entirely sympathized with her, she did not anticipate any difficulty in accomplishing this manœuvre.

“ All sorts of things happen at the sea-side,” said her mother, comprehensively, to her, when they were discussing the subject ; “ you never know what you mayn’t do ; and then the best of it is, that however far you may go, it leaves no mark afterwards when you come up to London ; so that, if no good comes of it, there is, at least, no harm done.”

The result of all these latent preparations was that Sydney, whose main object it was at present to keep his mother and the Hendersons asunder, lest, after his *éclaircissement*, she should receive a thoroughly unfavourable impression of Helen and Eva, heard, to his extreme annoyance, all the preliminaries of a joint stay at the sea-side settled in the most amicable manner between Jessy and Louisa, with an occasional “ Amen ” from James.

“ I mean to have my horse down,” said Louisa, affectionately ; “ and I shall be so glad to lend it to you. I am sure you could wear my habit.”

"Oh, how very kind!" cried Jessy. "I dote upon riding."

"And I hope we shall see a great deal of each other, and make a great many expeditions together. It is so pleasant having friends at the sea-side, and one never sees anything of one's friends in London."

"And you are such a walker, you know," said James—"you know you are *such* a walker—ain't you, now?"

"Yes," replied Jessy. "I shall call for you every morning at six o'clock precisely, and I shall expect to find you dressed in your best, waiting for me on the door-step."

"There cannot be the slightest doubt that she is flirting with me," thought he. "I know that's the sort of things girls say when they mean to flirt. But I must take care, or I shall have her expecting something serious. One never knows, where to draw the line with girls."

So he took care not to encourage the idea of her calling for him every morning; and Jessy, who, like every Lennard that ever was born, had a good deal of grave drollery in her, persisted in saying that she meant to do it, till he was quite frightened.

Meantime Sydney had got into a quiet corner with Mr. Henderson, and had broached the important subject. It was not difficult to deal with Mr. Henderson. He was skilful enough in avoid-

ing any topic on which he did not wish to speak, but this was perhaps because he was half-conscious that, if once made to open upon it, he was likely to open farther than he intended. Sydney instinctively understood how to treat him, and did not leave him a door of escape.

“A matter in which you are interested has come under my notice lately,” said he. “You know we doctors come across all sorts of family secrets. I think I ought to tell you that I have been hearing the history of your wards, the Miss Lakes.”

Mr. Henderson shrugged his shoulders, and looked very uneasy. “Not wards,” said he. “I gave them a home, and would have continued to do so if they would have stayed in it. But I have no sort of responsibility concerning them really.”

“Ah!” replied Sydney, “do you know how how they are situated now?”

“Well, I can guess. It’s a lamentable business. Never met with two such tempers in my life. There was no doing anything with them. The eldest, as of course you know, has done for herself completely; but I would have taken the little one back, really out of charity, you understand, if she could have been brought to hear reason a few months ago.”

“You would not take her back, now, then?” asked Sydney.

"Well, I should think twice about it. It's a very awkward story; and if it was whispered about, I should not like to have her in the house with Louisa. She has been too long away, you see."

"Do you know where they are?"

"We traced them to an out-of-the-way farmhouse, but they had left it before James got down there. The woman of the house was impenetrable; I suppose she had been thoroughly bribed; but James lighted upon a boy belonging to the place, who undertook to find out for him where they were gone, and who was to have communicated with us direct as soon as he was sure of his intelligence. We have heard nothing since; but the fact is we have not pursued the inquiry."

"They are very young to be left to themselves," said Sydney.

"Left to themselves!" repeated Mr. Henderson. "That's not exactly the way to put it. They have chosen their own way. I would have saved the girl if I could, but she was determined not to be saved. So what can one do?"

"And what do you suppose they will do?" inquired Sydney. "What can the end of it be?"

"Why, if their funds run short, I imagine they will make some sort of submission, and then we must do the best we can with them. It will be time enough to decide then. At present I

suppose they are well supplied with cash ; and so long as that lasts, there's nothing to be done. It would be the absurdest thing in the world for us to spend time and money and trouble in trying to force that obstinate little monkey to come here against her will, knowing that she would be a perfect firebrand in the house as long as she remained, and that she would run away the very first opportunity. As for the elder one, I give her up. I can have nothing more to do with her. She will probably go from bad to worse. Each of them will have a hundred a-year of her own when she comes of age. It can't be touched till then. If I could get hold of Eva, I should send her to school for three years, with very strict directions about watching her ; and if the other were to come to her senses, I should put her to board somewhere. But, for the present, I shall just let them alone.

"Do you know Mr. Rivers, of Fenbury Park ?" inquired Sydney.

"No, but he wrote to me—a very offensive letter I must say. He appeared to think that there had been a regular plot for getting hold of his heir, and he told me a great deal that I knew before, and said a great many things that were perfectly unnecessary. I answered him very shortly, and since then I have washed my hands of the whole concern. It has brought me nothing but annoyance."

There was a little pause, and then Mr. Henderson asked, "But how did *you* come across them?"

"Oh!" said Sydney, "that is a long story. It came in the course of my professional work; and the youth of the two girls, and their isolation, interested me a good deal. You know, I suppose, that the rascal has deserted them?"

"No, I did not know it," answered Mr. Henderson, looking more seriously disturbed than he had looked since the conversation began.

"Then it will be all up with them soon. I must consider what is to be done. Where are they?"

"I should like," said Sydney, by way of reply, "to be the medium of communication between you and them. My position as medical man gives me a sort of hold over them. The illness in which I attended the elder girl was very severe, and they felt grateful to me for having helped to cure her. If we could devise—if you could suggest—a plan for their future, I would do my best to induce them to acquiesce in it."

"You are very good," said Mr. Henderson, in an embarrassed manner. "I must think it over. I can settle nothing in a hurry. I'll see you again about it."

"There are great difficulties in the way," observed Sydney. "The affection of the two girls for each other is so strong that it would be almost

impossible, it seems almost cruel, to separate them."

"My dear Lennard, as a man of the world," expostulated Mr. Henderson, "I put it to you seriously, is it possible to arrange any plan for them which does *not* involve separation? The child is ruined if she is left with her sister. I feel all the difficulties—feel them so strongly, that I have been driven to let the matter alone. But if it comes into my hands anyhow, you know that *must* be the first condition."

"Is it absolutely certain, then," asked Sydney, lowering his voice, "that there was no marriage?"

Written words cannot convey the contempt with which Mr. Henderson dismissed this idea. He raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, gave a slight deprecatory sweep with his hands as if brushing away a gnat, and uttered a low expressive sound compounded of a hiss and a hem.

"Then it is a terrible case!" cried Sydney; "the wretched girl has been utterly deceived. We must deal very gently with her—she is not in a state at present to bear the parting; we must wait a little, I think, if you will forgive me for saying so, and to persuade her to acquiesce in it for Eva's good, when we have devised some feasible plan for herself."

Mr. Henderson looked sullen and uncomfort-

able, and as if he wanted to escape from the subject. "Oh ! wait as long as you like," said he, "I only wish I might never hear anything about it again. I tell you the girls are hopeless ; there's nothing to be done with them. I behaved like a father to them, and see what a return I have met with. There's no helping them. If you pull them out of the pond they'll fall into the river."

He moved away so decidedly that it was not possible to detain him, and Sydney stood still and reflected. He was very little nearer to a solution of his difficulties than he had been before, but he was still less near to the possibility of relinquishing his charge, even if he had desired to do so. It was more and more evident to him, that there was no one to befriend the sisters except himself. But what was to be done for them ? It was a relief to him to defer the question of separation ; he felt that it could not be considered yet. But it must come ; and he was inclined to think that the cruel decree would *not* be necessary in the end. If this poor girl had been simply deceived—if she was the victim of a cruel wrong—was she on that account to be deprived of the only comfort left to her ? And as for Eva, let the world say what it would, her place was surely with her sister. What other place was to be found for her ? To him, fresh from intercourse with her, the idea of sending her to school, and expecting her to stay there, if sent, appeared absolutely preposterous.

Let them be together at all risks, under some wise matronly care, which it should be his business to find, but still together.

This was his first rush of compassionate thoughts. But other considerations followed. Was it certain that Helen had not consented to her own deception, that she was not deceiving her sister? What kind of reliance would any man in his senses place on the principle or delicacy of a woman who had acted as she had acted? What kind of companion was she for an enthusiastic undisciplined girl of sixteen? What would Eva's future be if she was left to her own choice now? Something must be done for her, though it were done against her will and in spite of her efforts.

Another idea presented itself, which he scarcely ventured to entertain, though he did not spurn it from him with quite Mr. Henderson's disdain. If it should be a real marriage after all! If he could only obtain evidence to prove it!

He roused himself from his reverie, ashamed of having yielded to it somewhat conspicuously in public. He was a man who despised a want of self-command, whether in small things or great, and who always resented it when he detected it in himself. To punish himself for it now he put away with a strong hand the considerations which had absorbed him, and made himself so extremely agreeable to Lousia Henderson, that her mother

said to her when the party was over, she thought he had never yet been so pointed.

Sydney expected that Mr. Henderson would speak to him again before they parted, that he would appoint an interview, or suggest some definite line of action. But he did nothing of the sort. He busied himself with his guests, played the gracious host to perfection, and made such a parade of handing Mrs. Lennard to her carriage that he quite forgot to wish Sydney good-night. His smiles vanished when the last carriage drove away, and he had nothing but scowls for the bosom of his family. He had to tell his wife what had passed between himself and Sydney Lennard; and she had to tax him with want of judgment and foresight, and to establish a plausible objection to everything that he had said throughout the conversation, and to suggest all the things that he ought to have said, and did not. They wrangled themselves into such a state of excitement, that each had to take a strong dose of camphor julep in order to get a chance of going to sleep.

Sydney returned home oppressed by such thoughts as we have described, which all culminated in a resolution to go down to Northborough the next day. As he lighted his mother's bed-room candle in the hall, the servant said to him, "If you please, sir, there's a young person waiting to speak to you in the study."

"Waiting at this hour!" cried Mrs. Lennard.
"Oh, my dear, it's some bad case, and you won't
get to bed to-night."

"Very likely not," replied he, good-humouredly; "but that's no reason why you shouldn't, mamma. Make haste and sleep double, for yourself and me too!"

He ran lightly up-stairs, opened the study door, and to his utter dismay and astonishment encountered Eva!

END OF VOL. I.



